EMBER

PUBLISHED
TWICE A MONTH

Adventure

THE UNIVERSITY
OF TEXAS
FEB 15 1943
THE LIBRARY

Digitized by Google

"You Get The Job"

"We've been watching you, young man. We know you're made of the stuff that wins. The man that cares enough about his future to study an I. C. S. course in his spare time is the kind we want in this firm's responsible positions. You're getting your promotion on what you *know*, and I wish we had more like you.

The boss can't take chances. When he has a responsible job to fill, he picks a man *trained to hold it.* He's watching ***you*** right now, hoping you'll be ready when your opportunity comes. The thing for you to do is to start *today* and train yourself to do some one thing better than others. You can do it in spare time through the International Correspondence Schools.

No matter where you live, the I. C. S. will come to you through the mails. No matter how humble or important your present job, I. C. S. training will push you higher. No matter what your chosen work, some of the 280 practical I. C. S. home-study courses will suit your needs.

Choose Your Career

Do you like Advertising? Salesmanship? Many of the foremost Advertising and Sales Managers in this country were I. C. S. trained. Commercial Law? Accounting? All over America bookkeepers, accountants, private secretaries, office managers, are reaping the rewards of training gained in I. C. S. spare-time study of these subjects. Engineering? Architecture? Electricity? Chemistry? Hundreds of thousands of men have climbed into big jobs in the technical professions through the I. C. S. help.

The first step these men took was to mark and mail this coupon. Make *your* start the same way—and make it right now.

TEAR OUT HERE

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
BOX 2020, SCRANTON, PA.

Explain, without obligating me, how I can qualify for the position, or in the subject, before which I mark X.

☐ ADVERTISING MAN	☐ ELECTRICAL ENGINEER
☐ Salesmanship	☐ Electric Lighting
☐ Commercial Law	☐ Electric Car Running
☐ BUSINESS (Complete)	☐ Electric Wiring
☐ Certified Public Accountant	☐ Telegraph Expert
☐ Higher Accounting	☐ Practical Telephony
☐ Bookkeeper	☐ Railroader
☐ Stenographer and Typist	☐ Mine Foreman or Engineer
☐ Railway Accountant	☐ Metallurgist or Prospector
☐ WINDOW TRIMMER	☐ ARCHITECT
☐ Show Card Writer	☐ Contractor and Builder
☐ Outdoor Sign Painter	☐ Architectural Draftsman
☐ Common School Subjects	☐ Concrete Builder
☐ Good English	☐ Structural Engineer
☐ Teacher	☐ Plumbing and Heating
☐ Civil Service	☐ Sheet Metal Worker
☐ Railway Mail Clerk	☐ CHEMICAL ENGINEER
☐ CIVIL ENGINEER	☐ Illustrator
☐ Surveying and Mapping	☐ Designer
☐ MECHANICAL ENGINEER	☐ Textile Overseer or Supt.
☐ Mechanical Draftsman	☐ AGRICULTURE ☐ Spanish
☐ Machine Shop Practice	☐ Navigator ☐ German
☐ Stationary Engineer	☐ Poultry Raising ☐ French
☐ Gas Engineer	☐ AUTOMOBILES ☐ Italian

Name_____

Present Occupation_____

Street and No._____

City_____ State_____

If name of Course you want is not in this list, write it below.

Digitized by Google

Volume 15 Number 6
December 18, 1917

Published Twice a Month by THE RIDGWAY COMPANY
J. H. GANNON, President GEORGE B. MALLON, Secretary and Treasurer
Spring and Macdougal Streets - - New York City
6, Henrietta St., Covent Garden, London, W. C., England
Entered at the New York Post-Office as Second-Class Matter
ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Editor

Contents for Mid-December Issue, 1917

The Petals of Lao-Tze *A Complete Novel* . . . . . **J. Allan Dunn** 3
There are eight Petals. *Stuart McVea* has seven, and to secure the eighth for him he offers *King Keeler* $50,000. But the whole organization of the Chinese priests, secret service, and secret societies stand in the way.

General Grant's Cigar . . . . . **James Francis Dwyer** 69
When *Galloping Dick* made his trail through the valley which bears his name, little did he know the service it would render a Union army—nor did he realize the effect it would have on two young lives.

Proverbs *Poem* . . . . . **Richard Butler Glaenzer** 77

Out of the Wreck . . . . . **Captain A. E. Dingle** 78
Captain Gedge was money-mad and the storm wrecked his ship with every cent's worth of cargo on board. Yet that was the most profitable voyage he ever made.

To Quit My Post . . . . . **Edwin C. Dickenson** 87
The Army rule said no. But if he broke it, who would know? The romantic invitation and the beautiful Mexican night called to him—and he wavered.

Nerves of Iron . . . . . **W. C. Tuttle** 91
Magpie Simpkins and *Ike Harper* never realized what real bad men they were until they hit Spotted Dog. But their badness is so contagious that even the meek city marshal joins in the uproar.

Claymore *A Four-Part Story. Part II* . . . . . **Arthur D. Howden Smith** 102
In the second part of this thrilling story of Prince Charles' Rebellion, the *Master of Gairloch* conceives a new way to secure the chieftainship of the Clan Ross, and mysterious adventures befall *Sheila* and her clansmen. If you have missed the first part you will find it briefly retold in story form.

The Education of Mr. Giles . . . . . **Russell A. Boggs** 138
Mr. Giles was a railroad official, an official in his office, an official at home. But *Calvin Barnard* could never take officials seriously—so the dislike that *Mr. Giles* conceived for him assured the young telegraph operator a lively time.

The Adventurer *Poem* . . . . . **Will H. Hendrickson** 148

(Continued on next page)

Digitized by Google

(*Continued from preceding page*)

Phanfo the Terrible . . . . . **Charles Brown, Jr.** 149

Lincoln McCulloch was a missionary, not a dentist. But this fact would not have worried him had not Phanfo, the head-hunter chief, been seized with a terrible toothache, which he insisted the white man must cure.

The Gift of Experience . . . . . **George L. Catton** 159

Peter Faulkner was no quitter; but when he found his food cache was gone there could be but one result—starvation. So he prepared to meet it in a style befitting an Alaskan gold-hunter.

Hog-Tying the Golden Bow . . . . . **Douglas S. Watson** 161

Of all the industries, gold-mining and hog-raising seem to be the least related. But the combination proves a momentous one for the Big Dipper and also the Golden Bow.

The One Alone Called Kiwasa . . . . . **Hugh Pendexter** 176

In the days when the farthest Virginia settlements were located on the Thames River, the great forest beyond was the habitation of a dreaded Indian god, taboo to whites and Indians alike—but *Rick Bench* could not stop for taboos.

The Camp-Fire **A Free-to-all Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers** 181

Adventure's Free Services and Addresses 187

Ask Adventure 188

Lost Trails 191

The Trail Ahead 192

Headings . . . . . **T. S. Tousey**

Cover Design . . . . . **George M. Richards**

The Next ADVENTURE

The First January *Adventure*, which you will receive on December 3d, will start the year with a stirring Northwoods novel. In

"THE TRAIL OF THE BLACK FOX"

Kathrene and Robert Pinkerton

who gave you "The Iron Factor" and "Penitentiary Post," tell the story of the mystery surrounding an isolated fox-farm deep in the great North Country

ALSO

"THE AMBUSH IN THE PIPE"

Another of Hugh Pendexter's Indian stories, will take you back to the days of the Sioux and Pawnees

For other stories in this number see the Trail Ahead, page 192

First January Number

Published Twice a Month **Yearly Subscription, $3.00 in advance** **Single Copy, Fifteen Cents**

Foreign postage, $2.00 additional. Canadian postage, 60 cents.

Trade-Mark Registered; Copyright, 1917, by The Ridgway Company in the United States and Great Britain.

The editor assumes no risk for manuscripts and illustrations submitted to this magazine, but he will use all due care while they are in his hands.

Digitized by Google

Vol. 15 Adventure No. 6

December 18, 1917

1917

The Petals of Lao-Tze

A Complete Novel

by

J. Allan Dunn

Author of "Beyond the Rim," "On the Account," etc.

CHAPTER I

OM MA-NI PAD-ME HUM

"THE risks, I grant you, are great, therefore I am offering a commensurate reward. I believe you are the man I want. You answer all the superficial tests—but—I must make certain. Failure, Keeler, failure means more to me than what ordinary measure of life is left to me."

The pale blue eyes of Stuart McVea, filmed during most of the interview with the look of the mystic, the scientist and mental recluse, flashed with sudden light below the straggling eyebrows that matched his shock of iron-gray hair. King Keeler looked at him with added intent, struck by the peculiar emphasis laid upon the last sentence. He had seen the same gleam in the eyes of fanatics of various sorts and races and it confirmed his opinion that McVea was, to put it mildly, out of the ordinary.

"Go on," he said.

McVea settled back in his chair and sipped at a long glass of vichy palely tinged with Scotch whisky.

"I must eschew all excitement," went on the scientist. "It is imperative that my health be preserved, if possible improved, against the time you return—successful. Should you fail—?" The light faded and left his eyes lusterless with a glaze of apprehension. "But you must not fail. Do you hear me? You must not fail."

The gleam leaped back, the lined face flushed as he tapped out the words on the knee of the younger man.

Some crank, Keeler told himself. But, as long as he is financially responsible and I can see my way out, I should worry. He nodded as the other took a pull at his liquor.

"You know the country, you have been successful on many expeditions, you have a smattering of the dialects," continued McVea. "I have looked you up carefully. You are cited courageous and quick-witted.

Copyright, 1917, by The Ridgway Company in the United States and Great Britain. All rights reserved

Digitized by Google

You are in full vigor and—you can obey orders?"

"I am not fond of orders. But, if I enter into a contract, I carry the terms out to the letter—as far as it lies within my power."

"Ah, there is the hitch. Man, if you only knew what a colossal thing this represents. That I can not tell you. Mark, it would do you no good to know. No other white man could make use of what I want you to bring back. Only one other holds a hint and he has only the key while I possess the cipher. And I have bought the key. Power—power greater than you can imagine, Keeler. Tush, I am getting wrought up again."

He set his fingers to his pulse and frowned as he made a strong effort at control.

"Sclerosis must be avoided. So. That is better." He removed his long fingers from his wrist. "To control the heart-beat. That is the secret. You have seen it done. Eh, Keeler? Often, I'll warrant."

"Most of the fakirs practise it."

"Aye and the shamans, the lamas. But I must tell you all the risks. All, because you must know them all in order to surmount them. And because if you consider them too great you are not my man, after all. I want some one who is absolutely fearless."

"Then I am not your man," said Keeler. "For I have been afraid, desperately afraid, a score of times in tight places."

"Ah, but you got out of them. You are my man. I misused a word. I meant a man without cowardice. The coward and the fool laugh at fear and fall into panic. Two things more. You have investigated my standing?"

Keeler nodded again.

"And you are without entanglements? Wife, children, sweetheart?"

"I have none dependent upon me or on whom I depend. I am my own man, save as I contract myself."

"Good! Good! I need your single-mindedness. Too often the thought of a woman swings down the balance and magnifies the risk in hand. Blunts the keen edge of boldness. I shall tell you the story briefly. Later, if you accept, we will go into details. You are thirty-two, you say. How old do you think I am?"

Keeler scrutinized the lean face, bereft of all superfluous flesh. It held traces of sunburn, the lines about the eyes were the runes of travel, of gazing at far horizons, the throat was shrunken, there were hollows at the temples, the veins were prominent.

"Between fifty-five and sixty, I should say. But the marks I judge by might be those of illness rather than age."

"Aye, the runnels of pain. I am forty-seven. This is not irrelevant. You shall see. You are to go to Tibet, to a point eighty miles south and west of Lhasa. You must avoid Lhasa as you would the plague. In a glen, nearly fourteen thousand feet above sea-level, you will find a cave. There are several. You will know the right one by a crumbling pile of stones, an ancient votive dyke, a *mani*, nearly half a mile long. Near by are the remains of a *dung-ten*, a relic repository, and one wall of a *Lhak-kang*, a temple. In the wall one slab bears the olden Sanskrit words, the mystic sentence of Tibet and Mongolia. *Om ma-ni pad-me hum.*"

"I have seen it on ten thousand prayer-wheels," said Keeler. "Means 'Oh, the jewel of the lotus, Amen,' does it not?"

"Literally, yes, but there are mysterious meanings attached to each of the six syllables that only the initiate—only the initiate—understand."

McVea repeated the phrase in a low rapt voice. Keeler watched him curiously.

"Gone daffy over Lamaism," was his unspoken judgment. That accounted for the film over his eyes, the fanaticism of the sudden flash.

"Do you speak Tibetan?" The scientist seemed to force himself back from a compelling reverie.

"Only as a traveler picks it up. Enough for practical uses. There are a hundred dialects."

"Do you know anything of their religion?"

"Perverted Buddhism, as I understand it."

"Buddhism grafted on Taoism, or rather on the ancient Bon religion. A wondrous mixture of philosophy, necromancy and approved knowledge. So, it is not necessary.

"THIRTEEN years ago, Keeler, I was cornered in that cave by a band of inferior Lamas, furious at my possession of a talisman. Never mind how I obtained it. I had one servant with me, a Mongol. My caravan had been dispersed or killed. I built a barrier of loose rocks

Digitized by Google

and I held them off with my rifle. They shot Fing-Tu. Then they brought camels' dung and smoked me out. But—they did not find the talisman. I had hidden it where even their cunning could not discover it. And, because they thought they could make me tell where it was, they did not kill me but took me to Lhasa."

His eyes took on their introspective gaze. He shuddered and roused himself, finishing his glass.

Perhaps you know something of Tibetan torture methods. I bear the marks yet. I was ten weeks in the cellars of the *labrang*, the lamas' house, and that is why I look ten years older than I should. But they had not gone very far, for they healed me between whiles and they were very patient, before I was rescued."

"Rescued from Lhasa?" Keeler's eyes showed the incredulity he felt. A rescue from Lhasa, the Forbidden! McVea must have dreamed some of his adventures. For all his reputation and undoubted learning, the man's brain had a lesion. Strange religions and mania were close relations, as Keeler knew well. McVea looked at him composedly.

"You have forgotten the year. On the third of August, nineteen hundred and four, General Younghusband led the British armed mission into Lhasa and the Dalai Lama fled with Dorjiev, the Russian intriguer. I left for India with the expedition at the end of the month following.

This talisman is a leaf, or petal, of gold, about two and one-half inches in length and a trifle over an inch in its broadest part. I will show you one of its fellows. On one side you will find a turquoise, one of the eight mystic jewels, on the other characters are inscribed in Hindu Sanskrit. There are eight of these petals. I then held three more. I knew that this one was safe. Frankly, I did not dare return to Tibet. The memory of the ten weeks in the *labrang* was, is, to say the least of it, unnerving. And there were four more petals to obtain. I have seven now. And the eighth——"

"I am to bring back from Tibet."

"Exactly."

"Where is it?"

"Wait. You know comparatively little of Lamaism. The old temple and the votive dyke go back beyond that time. The temple was served by priests who held many of the tenets and knowledge of the old Bon religion before Tsong-khapa and Gedeen-tubpa, the Luther and Calvin of Buddhism, swept the land with reform.

"And much of that old-time worship lingers.

"In the land of Bod the life of a man is a cheap thing and the passing of a generation but a tick of the pendulum of time. They know I did not carry off the talisman, they were almost certain that I had it with me when I entered the cave. They are not sure whether I know its real value.

"But, if I did. If I had raped To-bhot of its most precious secret, of the long-lost wisdom of Lao-tze, founder of Taoism, the writer of Tao-te-King, the Book of the Way; then, if I still lived or had passed on that secret, some day I should surely return—or send a messenger."

"And they will be looking for him?"

"I think so. They would spare no chances."

Keeler was silent, calculating the hazards that to most men would seem insurmountable, his quick brain already evolving a plan to reach the valley. He knew what capture meant. Death by his own hand before the fanatic priests wreaked a fantastic vengeance upon him. McVea watched him anxiously.

"I can not go myself," he said. "I have no longer the stamina. I must hold what wealth I have to carry out my ultimate aim. But, if you can outline a scheme that promises to carry you through—and back again—I will spare neither expense nor final reward."

"Where is it?"

A look of infinite relief illuminated the face of the scientist.

"That is worth ten years of back-flung time to me," he said. "Draw closer." He sent a glance of infinite precaution round the walls of the big room, half library, half museum, before he whispered.

"I thrust it deep into the gullet of Fing-Tu before the acrid smoke from the camels' dung overcame me. It lies in the throat of a dead man, a servant, a despised Mongol. The Lamas would hesitate to defile themselves by touching his body. They might have ransacked his rags but they would never find the talisman. I buried it in his gorge, far beyond the *uvula*. The secret chokes him. It is safe. What think you?"

"There are leopards in Tibet. Bears, wild dogs."

Digitized by Google

"Not in this glen. On three sides the cliffs fall sheer for no less height than three hundred feet. The stream that flows down it, when Spring and Summer melt the ice, drops over a perpendicular wall scaled by the remains of an old ladder of wood and stone. No beast would climb it for the sake of what the valley might hold. The glen is inviolate. Nothing grows there over six inches high. Even the watchers, if there are any, will, I think, take their station on the cliffs.

"I myself was followed when I thought I had won free and took refuge in the defile hoping for a way out at the upper end. In the cave the temperature is never above freezing. Only the fall and force of the water causes the stream to flow at any time. Fing-Tu has been mummified by the cold."

"What is your offer?"

"Wait. It will be sufficient. There are some herbs and bulbs I wish you to gather en route. But that will be simple. I will give you minute directions, and descriptions. Now, have you a plan? This affair must not miscarry. It will take almost a year for you to come and go. I can not risk a mischance. There might not be time to send another expedition if you failed. And you might get the talisman and then have it taken from you. Tell me your plan."

For the life of him, Keeler could not judge the desperate desire of McVea for a scrap of carven gold inscribed in ancient script save from the standpoint of a man as fanatic as the Lamas themselves. Yet—if the price was sufficient, it was not for him to cavil. It was his profession, his choice, to risk his life for the sheer adventure of the quest. And his last trip had turned out disastrously from a financial standpoint for the lack of preliminary capital.

"I have a plan," he said. "It is simple but I believe it is the only one that would carry. I shall go as the head and owner of a caravan from Szechuan province. I shall go by rail from Shanghai to Hankau and thence by river up the Yangtze to Chungking. The caravans for Tibet start at Ching-tu and go over the Gya-lam, the China highroad, by Litang, Chiamda and Larego to Lhasa. I shall branch off before we reach the Forbidden City.

"The Szechuan men are often tall. I am dark and the sunburn will be sufficient. Once in the higher ranges I shall wear frostbite bandages and a hood. I can pass. I have done it before. I should carry coral, small diamonds and tea-bricks. That would explain a small and well-armed caravan. Twenty camels and a dozen yaks with ponies for mounts."

McVea nodded approvingly.

"It might be done. It is the plan to carry out. Now, how much do you want?"

There was no film over the eyes of McVea now, the keenness of a Scot peered out.

"I am trading with my life," said Keeler. "You make the offer. I will tell you if it is sufficient."

"Five thousand dollars in hand. All expenses of caravan and travel. Any profits yours and—twenty-five thousand dollars to be paid down upon your handing over the talisman."

"Fifty thousand."

"Man, in a way of speaking, you have me on the hip. You suit me best of all the applicants. But, fifty thousand?"

"Fifty thousand plus the five thousand in hand and the expense and possible profit. The last will be negligible." McVea sighed.

"Very well then. Your folks 'll be from Dundee, likely?"

"I am half Scotch and half Irish, born in Massachusetts."

"Wit, thrift and caution. 'Tis a good combination though hard to deal wi'. I'm Scots mysel' an' whiles I like to talk wi' the broad accent. Is that a'?"

"I must be assured. What if you die while I am away."

A spasm of something like actual pain showed on McVea's face.

"Ye munna talk like that. I am not going to dee. I canna. But we will arrange that. I will take ye to my lawyers. My heirs shall be charged wi' it." His accent dropped from his speech and his eyes flamed. "When can you start?" he asked.

"Direct from your attorneys' offices. I'll buy my outfit in Shanghai."

CHAPTER II

THE LAND OF BOD

KING KEELER possessed imagination but he kept it under curb, recognizing it as the spur that urged him to explore strange horizons but realizing its drawbacks. He used it as an ally but, in times of peril,

Digitized by Google

he discounted it, dealing only in facts.

His ancestral combination was a happy one, save when the conglomerate separated into distinct strata and one dominated the others too entirely. This Gael of New England upbringing was a distinct type. His Irish blood led him into danger for the love of the risk; his Scotch-Gaelic origin gave him more cautious attributes while fond of the fight, once it was started. The latter gave him understanding also of the peculiar trend of McVea's mysticism, no greater than that of any Highlander at root and blossoming under the esoteric influences of the Far East. It gave him also a shrewd idea of money values.

He could not see wherein McVea saw the value of his money for this sliver of gold. As a curio to complete the golden blossom of eight petals it had, of course, a nebulous value. But even for a man as rich as McVea was reported to be, sixty thousand dollars—for, with the expenses, the total amount would easily reach that sum—was a big price to pay.

McVea had spoken of Lao-Tze, the "Old Boy" of Taoism, born six hundred and four years before Christ, at whose feet Confucius had sat and acknowledged a strange mastery that "plunged his soul in trouble." The "Book of the Way and of Virtue," the little volume of five thousand characters in which Lao-Tze summed up all his wisdom and from which the lore of Taoism is built up, held, as Keeler knew, much of magic and divination in its metaphysics.

It was probable that McVea had found, or thought he had discovered, one of these profound secrets inscribed upon the golden petals, involved in the oracular, obscure root-strokes of the ancient characters.

Keeler, like those who have lived for any length of time in the Far East and dabbled in its lore, was cautious as to limiting the strange powers of the ancient shamans. He had seen many marvels and he knew that at the core of the race lay a mighty power for knowledge.

The race that was highly civilized when Europe was in barbarism might well hold some great secret dimmed by the sloth of centuries, veiled in a maze of metaphysics and religious rituals, but still to be uncovered by a master mind. It was the leaven of his New England upbringing that kept Keeler sceptical, yet still able to comprehend McVea's fanaticism and understand that it might be based upon a germ of truth.

All of which, he told himself, was none of his business.

He chose his men and got together his caravan ostensibly for trading to Tibet. It was not hard to secure the bulbs and roots that McVea wanted and after seven months of slow, precarious travel he arrived at his destination, atop of the world, thirteen thousand eight hundred feet above sea-level in the Land of Bod, of To-Bhot, the mysterious, desolate plateau region of Tibet. Lhasa, the Forbidden City, lay eighty miles to the north and east. He was on the threshold of the secret.

He had left his caravan encamped two miles below the gateway cliff to the glen. Under McVea's urgent instructions, he was to enter the defile alone, the better to preserve the secrecy of the quest, come success or failure. He clambered up the wall where the frozen fall hung like the beard of the Ice-King himself and stood at last at the foot of the cliff beside the ruined temple and the votive dyke, every faculty intent.

His pulses were galloping from the altitude and the exertion of every movement in the rarefied air. The breath came from his nostrils in spurts of blue smoke. Keeler's life had developed the super-education of his normal five senses into the sensitive condition that is called the sixth, and that instinct was vibrant with alarm. The frozen glen seemed the abode of solitude and silence but he felt danger.

He held the knowledge that he was being watched. He had known the same feeling in the matted bush and jungles of Burmah and the South Seas, the presence of a lurking, unseen enemy, the presentiment that achieves the paralysis of courage, unless cured by action.

It was ten degrees below zero. The oppression of the Wintry scene lay heavily upon him. A dull, cloudless sky arched above a waste of snow and ice. Not a sound was to be heard, the air was as silent and apparently as tenantless as the earth, unstirred by the wing of a bird, untouched by pad or hoof or foot save his own prints on the rough snow-covered ground. The icy, wind-swept surface of the frozen stream lay down the defile like a naked sword-blade.

That the place was pregnant with peril, the grisly thing lying in the cave that showed

Digitized by Google

like the livid wound of a dead man in the face of the cliff, attested. He made an excellent target on the white expanse but he did not believe the danger one of imminent moment. The Lamas who might have marked him down would not be inclined to let him die so easily.

"My troubles," he muttered in the *sotto voce* of the traveler who has no one of his own tongue to talk with, "start from the moment I lay hands on that bit of gold. And, when I get it, it's a long trek back to Broadway. Well, if the risk is high, the pay is good. Here goes."

His shadow trailing after him, was that of a giant. He was over six feet and he was muffled up in clothes lined with sheepskin. A fur hood was well down to his eyes, leaving only a small oval of weather-tanned face, dark as a Tartar's, swathed in bandages.

He glanced about him, taking in the dim inscription on the wall. *Om ma-ni pad-me hum.* The message of the centuries, coeval with the brick-records of Babylon, seemed to bear a warning to the unbeliever. The modernism of his heavy automatic was comforting, as was the powerful electric torch that he carried.

Before he started to climb he produced a camera, a tiny thing of nickel that lay in the palm of his hand, of German make, with a wonderful lens. He clicked off records of the temple and the votive dyke, a general view of the glen and the opening of the cave.

Cameras don't lie, he told himself. Prints can be doctored but you can't fake a film without it showing and, if the talisman isn't there, I'll have some evidence to show I got here.

He put away the camera and made one comprehensive glance of the place before he started to climb over the cliff detritus to the cave opening. Still there was neither sign nor sound of life and still the feeling clung that every movement that he made was observed. It was possible that they were waiting for him in the cave. Until he actually laid hands upon the talisman he was practically safe.

A little wind had sprung up, hardly noticeable to the flesh, but sufficient to blow the frozen snow-particles from the cliff-tops in a steady whirl. Far off, a snow-banner streamed to leeward of a peak. Soon there was going to be a change of weather.

Once in the rift, Keeler switched on his torch and thanked the Shanghai battery manufacturers for the purity of material that had held captive the current. It streamed through the crystal bull's-eye of the lens and flooded the cave with light. A tunnel ran back for perhaps a hundred feet, then sharply elled to the left. Fifty feet in Keeler stepped over a pile of rocks that had formed the barrier behind which McVea had fought off the lamas. Beyond the rocks were scattered the brass sockets of the rifle cartridges. The body of Fing-Tu was evidently around the angle. Before he turned the ray in that direction Keeler set it down, stooped, picked up a handful of the cartridge shells and carefully strewed them on the frozen floor of the cave. Then he turned the torch lens toward the cave-mouth and, seeing nothing, started to exploit the branch of the tunnel.

The diverging shaft of light shone on something propped against the back wall of the cavern that looked like the stuffed body of a dummy. Limbs that seemed to be dried boughs projected stiffly in scarecrow fashion from a bundle of colorless rags. Lolling to one side, hung the head, a hideous mask with holes for eyes, wispy hair and yellow teeth that showed between blackened lips in a mocking grin that was the travesty of welcome.

Keeler was not squeamish; he had seen death in many unpleasant forms but he did not relish the task ahead of him. He arranged the light-ray conveniently, put down his gun beside it and picked up the frozen bundle of rags and bones and shriveled flesh. Laying it with the grinning face upward upon the floor that was to serve as dissecting table, he took out his sheath-knife and knelt by the side of the thing that once had been a man. Two minutes later he rose, his lips compressed but his eyes triumphant, and looked more closely at the object that lay in the hollow of his palm.

It was an ovate piece of heavy metal, the brown, crusted surface holding no hint of the gold he knew it to be. The characters were half obliterated by corrosion and the brown deposit. Keeler thrust the find into a special pocket of his belt and bent once more over the mummified corpse.

The skull with its prominent malar bones that marked it as Mongolian, was merely hinged to the body by a strip of skin and withered cartilage. Keeler started to hide the mutilation with the ragged folds of the dead Fing-Tu's garments when something, as

Digitized by Google

indefinable as the fall of a snowflake or the shadow of a flying bird, sounded the alarm in his brain.

HE SHUT off the ray and stood in the darkness, his gun in ready fingers, balled on his toes, bent forward, holding his breath, waiting.

A tiny tinkle sounded. Two of the cartridges in the main tunnel had struck together. Keeler glided forward to the angle where the cave turned. The diffused light from the entrance showed him faintly where to halt. He could just see a segment of the tunnel mouth. Suddenly something slipped and slid and gasped. The intruder had stepped upon one of the cartridge shells and it had rolled treacherously underfoot.

The light stabbed through the gloom and, in its circle, Keeler held the evil face of a Tibetan, dazzled by the sudden glare, the eyes staring like an owl's in the sun. The man fired at the ray but the bullet passed beneath Keeler's outspread arm and the next instant the Tibetan pitched forward at the impact as the missile from the heavy automatic tore through his skull.

The torch showed no one backing the fallen man and Keeler quickly knelt and opened the rough outer coat, disclosing the yellow garment of the lama.

"Now I wonder," said Keeler as he straightened up, "whether you were a lone sentinel and thought you could get away with me all by yourself, thereby acquiring very great merit, or whether there are more of you awaiting outside. I think I shall make a hurried exit, on the chance of it. Meantime, Fing-Tu has company."

He paused for a moment before he showed himself in the entrance. The glen showed silent and lonely as before and he wondered where the lama could have hidden himself so conveniently. The snow-dust was still flying. Going lightly as a goat for all his bulk, Keeler bounded to the foot of the cliff and made with leaping strides for the wall over which dropped the waterfall. If it had not been discovered, a rope he had left dangling from crest to floor was going to provide him with a speedy getaway.

A bullet *spanged* in a smear of lead on the frozen surface of the cliff, ten feet above his head, another *whupped* into the snow directly in front of him. The glen rang with the echoes of the shots as he reached his safety line and slid to the bottom. He seemed to be out of range for the moment. His camel was hidden behind some boulders near the fall and he mounted, urging the sleepy brute to rise and then prodding him with his knife into a swinging lope down the defile.

As beast and rider came out into the open the shooting recommenced. Keeler crouched low between the double humps of his Bactrian and the camel, stung in the flank by a creasing bullet, lengthened its stride and sped wildly down the slope. Keeler checked the frightened beast. Its heart was pounding under his legs and he knew that much deep inhalation of the "wind of the mountains" would soon see it floundering and exhausted. Once more they got out of range of the hidden marksmen and he pulled down the camel to a walk, scanning the slopes for signs of the pursuit he knew would be soon starting.

"Three of 'em," he told himself. "And the two fired from the cliff opposite the cave. They were slack on the job or they would have got that range down to a nicety long ago. Probably can't get the hang of the sights. The gun that chap used in the cave was the vintage of forty-nine. But the reports will bring out the lamas like a nest of hornets. I'll bet there are twenty temples between here and Lhasa."

He fired three shots in swift succession in the air. He could see the specks of his caravan far down the slope and he repeated the signal for instant departure, slipping a fresh clip into the handle of his gun and seeing that a cartridge was in the firing chamber.

As he swung down upon the dismantled camp, already stretching out into a marching line of camels, yaks and men on hardy long-haired ponies, his headman rode out to meet him. Keeler's field-glasses were slung over his shoulder, crossing the cartridge bandoleer, and he handed them to their owner.

To the east black dots moved across the merging circle of the powerful lenses. There were more to the north. From the glen he had just left emerged the two specks of the men who had fired at him. Unencumbered by any impedimenta, the pursuers were coming on rapidly. Little flecks of light broke out that Keeler knew were heliographic signals to others who would be waiting for them somewhere ahead.

There was nothing to do but trust to flight and put up a stubborn fight if they were

Digitized by Google

ambushed or overtaken. Their trail in the snow was too plain to hope to throw off pursuit by making a circuit. They entered a ravine that rose abruptly from the plain and widened to the only practicable pass between the glen and the caravan route. Keeler took a last survey. The two bodies of the pursuit were rapidly converging. At least two hundred men were after them and at any minute more might spring up ahead. Keeler knew how a country apparently deserted might be actually alive with crawling men.

He looked at his little caravan. The steam of painful breath jetted out at every step from laboring men and animals. He had twenty picked Chinese with him. Their faces, what could be seen of them under the wraps were stoical. They would put up a game fight, he reflected, but they were rotten shots. The caravan might travel faster if they discarded the bales but that meant positive death from cold and starvation. Also, though unseen at present, danger threatened in front as badly as from the rear.

"You pay your money and you take your choice," muttered Keeler. "Right now I'd discount that fifty thousand for twenty per cent. of its value to have a quittance out of this mess. The fuss has started and, from here back to New York, it is going to be merry —— with the door shut.

His two Dorabis, native Tibetan guides from the lowlands, rode beside him, watching the movement of his lips. The *pondo*, they decided, was praying, and, if his special gods were powerful, this was an excellent moment for them to display their talents. If the caravan entrained and defended itself it would be but a question of time before they were swamped by the odds and the ultimate end of those not lucky enough to be killed in the skirmish was not a pleasant thing to contemplate. It would be something unusual and worthy of the occasion.

What this Mongol from Ching-Tu had done that called down the displeasure of the lamas the Dorabis did not know. It made no difference. They were in his company and, as his allies, they would suffer with the rest. Eyes with the lids removed and exposed to snow-glare might be the preface of the torture. The Dorabis did not pray, they had prayer-wheels at home and in the temples that performed that function automatically. But they watched Keeler, or, as they knew him, Lhang-Tu, with the eyes of troubled dogs.

Keeler had set his own precautions against an unusual death. In his case much deliberation would decide the particular forms of lingering torment. And he had prepared an "out," not the last cartridge from his own gun, but a pellet of cyanide wrapped in a scrap of oiled paper and fastened among the roots of his untrimmed hair with a pellet of wax.

Now as he surveyed his little force, the line of his jaw showed through his face wrappings and his eyes were serene despite his fear. For, without cowardice Keeler believed that he had come to the end of the road. He had faced death many times. To do so was a part of the hazard that made up the thrill of travel. It was hard luck to cash in at a loss before the game of life was well started and he hated to fall down on his contract, but he faced the prospect sturdily.

"It begins to look to me," he said softly, "as if the jig was up." He turned to the two Dorabis. "Listen," he said. "If you and Sokpa can steal aside you may be able to hide and join a caravan and so pass clear. I will give you the money I promised you."

"No, deba, the end is not yet. See."

The man held out his hand, showing the tiny snow-crystals that he had intercepted.

"We do not fight alone, deba. Unless they reach us before we gain the pass they will never find us."

Keeler looked at the sky. The promised change of weather had arrived in time. His luck held. In fifteen minutes pursuers and pursued were divided by a screen of whirling snow. Beyond the beast ahead of him he could see nothing of his caravan. He pushed down his mitten so that his wrist-compass was handy and hurried to the head of the line. On through the storm the train plodded, the animals linked into one unit by a rope. Two miles of blind travel and they emerged from the flurries to an altitude below the storm and swung south. The way ahead was clear.

CHAPTER III

ROUGE ET NOIR

THE mere desire for travel does not make the successful adventurer any more than an ear for music or an eye for color presupposes a Paderewski or a Whistler.

Digitized by Google

With the other professions, that of explorer demands a hard-earned technique based upon natural qualifications. The lack of learning leads often to the amateur's disaster. The successful traveler must know how to ride, to handle a boat, to navigate, to shoot, to conserve his physical vigor, look after the health and comfort of his outfit and command their respect and obedience, mainly through the force of his own example.

He must have a knack for dialects, be able to cook a little, to practise simple surgery and know his *materia medica* at least as well as a druggist's clerk. He must have some chemistry, some botany, some metallurgy and be a little better than a Jack of many trades. And, above all, he must have self-control, know when to simmer in diplomatic patience and when to explode to sudden action.

Keeler had matriculated in this college. And one of the axioms he had acquired was always to leave the back trail open. Rather than destroy his bridges, he builded them wherever crossings were dangerous. He knew that his main peril of the present quest lay rather in delivery than discovery. He did not underestimate his enemies and he assumed that he would be followed.

Moreover, it was not, as he conceived it, a part of his contract to look out solely for his own safety and he had no intention of blazing the way for spies back to McVea. On the way in he had taken precautions for the way out.

At Ching-tu he dismissed his caravan, well satisfied with their pay and Lhang-Tu, the trader, disappeared. In the guise of an elderly and very provincial merchant named Pung-Li, en route to visit his son at Hankau, Keeler floated down the Yang-tze-kiang from Chung-king on a light-draft rice-boat. He slept little, cat-napping in the daytime in the tiny cabin of bamboo poles and matting, winning the friendship of the crew by additions to their scanty fare and libations from a great jar of *samshu*.

In the gorges the craft was boarded by river pirates and Keeler, as Pung-Li, gained their admiration by his fighting qualities in the repulse. At Hankau he broke the now empty jar and took from its fragments the talisman.

At Ichang he had sent on a message by the native purser of a river steamer, staying himself aboard the rice-boat until they reached Hankau. There the bodyguard of a mandarin official met and escorted Pung-Li to the railroad, followed by a group of wharf idlers who trailed the party like jackals who track a lion and fear there will be no marrow in the bones. And Keeler thought he observed a strong resemblance in one of these to the leader of the pirates.

He did not sleep on the train trip to Shanghai and he sent a telegram from Hankau so that two burly Chinese who bore all the marks of tong fighters met him on the platform and strolled with him to the curio store of one Ah-Lung where he was welcomed and taken into the back room. Within the minute a man who bore a likeness to the head jackal at Hankau entered and bargained with Ah-Lung over the sale of some jade beads, hinting strongly at privacy until Ah-Lung with a smile ushered him into the back room.

The bead-seller was curious about the furnishings of the room and whispered more hints of his having been followed by a man who wrongfully claimed the beads. Ah-Lung regretted the lack of any other door save the one that led from the shop and the man left without closing the bargain.

In the meantime Pung-Li had dissolved into thin air for all time. Keeler, dressed in white linen and solar tope, clean-shaven and with his hair roughly clipped, emerged on a side street and was carried to a popular tea-house on the Bubbling Well road.

From there he rang up the Shanghai Club and presently an automobile arrived with three men in it who greeted him as "King, you wandering old scout," and bore him off to the club by devious stages of entertainment.

There was a package waiting for him when he went up to his room, carrying a few letters and a cablegram that had been waiting for him for seven weeks. The parcel came from Ah-Lung and held a collection of herbs and bulbs. From a belt well hidden under his loosely cut tunic Keeler drew two automatics from their holsters. The clip of one of them held no cartridges though there was one in the firing chamber. The spring had been removed and, in its place, snuggled the talisman.

He hefted it in his palm, turning it over to note the dulled turquoise imbedded in one side and wonder at the inscriptions.

Digitized by Google

"You are a bit out of the Thousand and One Nights," he said musingly. "A par with Aladdin's Lamp and the Magic Carpet. And you are beginning to look like fifty thousand dollars. We are half-way through. If I had not promised McVea not to let you out of my personal possession I should be strongly tempted to trust you to the mails but that would not insure my own immunity and I want to collect. Come in."

He palmed the scrap of gold as a sleek China boy slid in with Scotch and tansan and ordered the things set down on a service table. With a swiftly shifting glance from his almond-agate eyes, the Oriental obeyed and left the room.

"He's got an inventory of everything that isn't out of sight," Keeler told himself. He was looking for treachery from every direction now. Chinese and Tibetans are akin and Chinese club boys invariably gamble, therefore are to be bribed.

A heavily strapped and locked portmanteau of leather had already been brought up. Before he opened his correspondence Keeler unfastened the bag and took out some clothes which he laid aside to be pressed. Next came a pair of buckskin shoes. He went to the window and looked out upon the gallery that ran along the rear of the building above the compound.

Then he locked his door softly and took the left-hand shoe, prying at the heel carefully with the thin blade of his knife. It came apart, disclosing a narrow, shallow slot into which he snuggled the talisman, plugging it with dampened cotton from his medicine-chest. He tested the projecting nail-points in the lower-heel layers, pressed them carefully into place, rubbed a little wax over the leather and changed his shoes.

Then he opened the cablegram. It was from McVea.

Waste no time in returning. Report directly my address. More instructions Palace Hotel, San Francisco. Cable from Shanghai. Use all precaution especially necessary at present time. Draw on me by cable if necessary.

He set fire to the thin paper and watched it burn on a metal ash-tray. Then he read his letters. There was none of particular interest and no more word from McVea.

The room telephone tinkled. It was Bob Sinclair, owner of the motor-car that had fetched him from the tea-house.

"You're booked for dinner at my place tonight, King," said his friend's cheery voice. "Wife has some one to meet you. I know you're not keen on the fair sex but —well, wait, that's all. Seven sharp."

"Hold on," called Keeler as Sinclair's tones proclaimed the end of his communication. "When is the next steamer for San Francisco?"

"*Pride of Cathay.* Thursday. Remember, seven o'clock."

"Three days in Shanghai," muttered Keeler. "Three days too many. I am not hankering after the fleshpots until I get rid of—" he clipped off his speech and pressed his heel upon the matting to supply the gap.

"I've got to cut out talking to myself," he reflected, frowning at his coppery face in the glass. "It's a dangerous habit. And I've got to get my hair cut properly. Tonsorially, I'm no artist."

"So, Mrs. Bob is up to her old tricks. She'd risk being expelled from heaven for breaking the rule about match-making. Still, as I have to stay over, civilization in the shape of femininity and finger-bowls is not altogether unpleasant."

He rang his bell and sent out his dinner clothes to be pressed.

"See here, boy," he said to the same agate-eyed chamberman, "I no like my things touched, you *sabe?* I put everything away. Suppose you no do, can tell. Then you no catchee *kumshaw* tippee. *Sabe?*"

The boy grinned and left. Keeler stretched a slender thread of silk between the lintels of the tall windows behind the veranda blinds, fastening the ends with wax, ankle high, repeated the same process at the door, stepping over the line as he went out.

He secured a modern hair-cut at the club shop, sent a cable to McVea and wound up at the steamship office.

"It is impossible to guarantee you a stateroom by yourself, Mr. Keeler," said the booking clerk. "We would like to accommodate you but the travel is too heavy. In fact there are only a dozen possible berths scattered about the ship and one cabin."

"I will pay for the rest of the accommodation."

"I am sorry but we can not guarantee. You can see Mr. Osborne, if you like."

Digitized by Google

KEELER did like, but he came out from the passenger-agent's office with frowning face. He had wanted the privacy of the cabin for security. So far he had run the gantlet with immunity but, despite his own precautions that had worked out so admirably, he mistrusted the ease with which he had come through.

There were no Chinese employed on the *Pride of Cathay* which was an American bottom and only Chinese passengers duly registered to enter the United States were allowed to travel. Three of these were booked. The agent knew all of them personally and, on the surface, they appeared to be harmless and ordinary, fathers of peaceful families back in San Francisco, cueless, placid merchants; but he resolved to keep an eye on them. None of them would be cabined with him, of course, yet——"

A hail from a tall man, lean, hawk-eyed, almost as dark as Keeler himself, checked him. It was Bindloss, American Consul at Shanghai.

"I have been looking for you, Keeler," said the official. "When did you get in?"

"This morning, from Hankau?"

"Hankau? I heard you were in Tibet?"

Keeler's eyebrows went up.

"Did you? Look here, Bindloss, are you quizzing me officially? Because if so, I must decline to talk. My affairs have been private ones. I have been to Hankau."

"I am not trying to probe you, Keeler. Exactly the opposite. But I want to have a talk with you. You are going to the Sinclairs' tonight?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll see you there. I told you I didn't want to know where you have been or what you have been doing. That is straight. Also, our talk will be based entirely upon unofficial lines, and friendly ones. Don't come to my office. Officially I don't want to have anything to do with you. Get me?"

"I get the drift of your words, if that is what you mean. I'll see you later then."

"Now what the devil," he asked himself as he made his way back to the club, "what the devil is Bindloss driving at? And who in the name of Shin-tung tipped off to him that I was in Tibet. Unless it was a shot in the dark?"

Half a dozen men hailed him as he entered the main room of the club and dragged him off affectionately for an ante-dinner peg. Keeler was a man's man. Most of them knew of things that he had achieved and realized, envying perhaps, the nerve and stamina that was needed for such accomplishments.

He broke loose from them at half-past six and went up to his room. In front of his door he carefully surveyed the corridor before he produced his key. He stepped high and closed the door, then knelt to look at the gray web he had spun across the threshold. It was broken.

The thread at the window was intact. Seemingly nothing had been touched in the room but Keeler's eyes noticed the signs of a thorough search through his belongings. His dinner-clothes were brought up at his ring.

"What for you come along my room?" he demanded of the boy.

The Oriental's agate eyes filmed.

"This room I no come along," he said. "What for I come? You no here. You no ring. Room he all fixee."

"Don't lie to me, John," said Keeler quietly. "Suppose you come, I speak you I can tell. Suppose one more time you do this, plenty trouble for you. *Sabe?* Heap big pidgin trouble. Now get out."

The boy left without protest, his face stolid as a waxen mask. But Keeler knew that his eyes had not filmed unnecessarily. He got into his dinner-clothes of white-linen trousers and mess jacket, tied his tie clumsily from lack of practise, renewed it to his satisfaction, replaced his shoes with the talisman in the heel, slipped an automatic into his hip pocket and went downstairs.

A fellow member asked his destination and offered him a lift in his car to the Sinclairs' cozy bungalow. Keeler walked through the compound garden to the low veranda that bordered the entire house and with the ease of an intimate entered through the long French windows that stood open to the drawing-room. A girl rose to meet him from a lounging chair beside a standard lamp. He caught sight of a flash of slim, silken ankles as she got up and extended her hand.

"This is Mr. Keeler, is it not?" she said. "Bob is in the kitchen with Dorothy. There's a new cook, I believe, and he can't find the right casseroles or something. I'm Miss Arden."

Digitized by Google

Keeler suddenly realized that he was holding her hand a little longer than was customary, or necessary; gazing with an expression that he felt was fatuous into, to him, the most beautiful of faces. He never came back from months of barbaric sojourn without a feeling of delight in the soft, refined charm of women of his own race, but he had hitherto regarded them much as one would enjoy other refinements of civilization.

From a sex standpoint they had never appealed to him. Some day, when he had found the deposit of river jade in Burmah—he expected to use the fifty thousand from McVea to organize the expedition—he had vaguely thought of settling down somewhere, with some one. But woman was to his masculinity emphatically the opposite sex, a luxury to protect and surround with proper environment.

Now! He saw a face that was pale, the tint and texture of a gardenia petal. Not dead-white but creamy, with vitality exuberant in the red lips, a trifle full; in the blue eyes verging to purple, brilliant but not hard, and in the flame of her hair. It was almost scarlet and, in the lamplight, it was fuzzy with radiance. The whole personality was startlingly vibrant, magnetism emanated from her fingers, from her whole being. Her aliveness, her compelling suggestion of dynamic energy, challenged his, recognized it, responded to it as she stood smiling, as tall as he was, less three inches.

Her smile widened as she caught his momentary embarrassment and a twinkle showed in her eyes.

"Yes, I am King Keeler," he said.

He was not enchanted. He was in full possession of his faculties and his brain was alert. Here was not so much a woman, eminently and divinely feminine as she appeared, as a kindred spirit and yet, yet—for all her welcome and the geniality of her handclasp, he sensed two things that puzzled him. One was a dim feeling of former acquaintanceship, perhaps merely a likeness of feature to some one. The other was a warning of antagonism, subtle but persistent.

She stood chatting with him for a few moments. Her hair, thought Keeler, was literally her crest, an index to her character, impulsive, virile, like flame; apt to be either dangerous or warming. She was a woman, a girl, if you preferred the term, for she was undoubtedly young, who would command the instant attention in crowded company, as compelling as a bright fire in an empty room.

"*Rouge et noir*," cried a gay voice as Dorothy Sinclair breezed into the room followed by her husband carrying the cocktails he allowed no one to compound, or serve, but himself. "Do you ever gamble, King?"

"Rarely," he answered lightly. "Never when I do not understand the game."

He understood the apt allusion to the two of them as they stood by the tall lamp, the one swarthy by nature, burned by travel, the other fair as a lily save for the flaming aureole that contrasted with his own black crown, trim now and sleek to his well-formed head.

Both the women laughed. Sinclair offered the cocktails.

"The Bindlosses can wait for the next round," he said. "These'll lose all the essence of the fresh limes. I wonder what's keeping them?"

The consul and his wife, a vivacious blonde, much of the type of Dorothy Sinclair, entered with apologies.

"Sam had to go down to his office," said Mrs. Bindloss. "He is the original Man of Mystery of late. I know something's in the wind when he holds appointments after hours and won't tell me what they are about."

"A woman should abandon curiosity when she enters the consular service, even by proxy, my dear," returned her husband. "But it wouldn't interest you. Bob, give me one of those cocktails. I need it."

"I told you to wait, King," said Sinclair as the ladies momentarily retired. "Isn't she a wonder? I call her the Queen of Hearts. Did you ever see such hair?"

"Magnificent. What happened to your cook?"

"Pah! Nothing but stomach. What a man!"

"You'd feel the same way if you'd lived for six months off rice, gobs of fat pork and fish-scraps," retorted King.

"I don't know how the new chef will turn out. Sing took sick this morning and sent another man in his place."

Keeler thought he surprised an expression of special interest in the consul's face. Sinclair went on.

Digitized by Google

"Since you don't appreciate the lady I've half a mind to make Dorothy change the place-cards. Anyway, if her looks don't affect you, she can talk so you will listen. She can speak *kuan-hua* almost as fluently as you can, King."

"She talks Mandarin?" The voice of Bindloss rang out sharply and once more Keeler looked at him in surprise.

"Yes, she was born in Pekin. Her father carried her through the streets to the British Legation in June, 1900, dragging her brother along with them ten yards ahead of Prince Tuan and the Boxers. He was a constructing engineer for the Pekin Tien-Tsing Railroad. She lived there until she was seventeen, which is just six years ago. She is not a dab at the vernaculars, like you are, but she knows something of China and she is crazy to go on a trip into the interior."

"Ah, is she a friend of yours or your wife's, Sinclair? How did you meet her?"

"Why, I hardly know, Bindloss. She arrived in Shanghai about two months ago with a pile of introductions and there were quite a number of folks who remembered her or knew her father. Hasn't she applied to you officially?"

"Not yet."

The ladies returned and they paired off for the dining-room, Keeler with Claire Arden, Sinclair with Mrs. Bindloss and his wife on the arm of the consul. As the deft servant served the oysters Keeler found himself pondering over the crispness of the consul's "not yet" and the special interest he was sure the representative of America took in Miss Arden.

CHAPTER IV

BINDLOSS MAKES A SUGGESTION

THE Irishman in Keeler was dominant that night. Twenty-four hours before he had been masquerading as a Chinaman, huddled up in the seat of the train between Hankau and Shanghai. For seven months he had heard no English spoken and had lived on the lid of a volcano in very questionable company where the possession of a comb or any suggestion of aught but the most superficial cleanliness would have brought dangerous suspicion. He was still on the lid of the volcano, which might tilt at any minute, but he was in pleasant company.

The slick feel of silk was next to his limbs, still grateful to the porcelain tub at the club, to the hot water, the good soap, the shower and the alcohol rub. He was clad in immaculate linen, talking to beautiful women and likable men. There were flowers on the table and shaded candles, silver and crystal, and it was a far cry to the frozen glen in Tibet where he had left the priest to keep ghostly vigil with the mummy of Fing-Tu.

Altogether he felt well-groomed, inside as well as out, as the product of the new chef proved excellent. The risks he was running weighed lightly on his spirit and his wit, long bottled, flowed easily. And, for every sally, Claire Arden had one to cap it. She reminded him of Shakespeare's Beatrice, born beneath a dancing star. She drew him out to talk of his adventures though not of his present achievement. She challenged him with words and eyes and fenced cleverly with quip and quirk while Dorothy Sinclair beamed at the apparent success of her match-making.

Still her latent hostility against him was apparent to Keeler. It was not a dislike of the "Doctor Fell" variety. He liked her and he did not believe she disliked him. It was something beneath the surface. As the evening wore on he thought that the girl became more gracious. He noted that Bindloss eyed her with something more than polite interest and he unconsciously linked that up with his wonder of what the consul wanted to say to him.

The talk, as it always will in such places, shifted to native affairs and the question of China's attitude toward foreigners in general and Japan in particular, came up in due course.

"One of the problems," said Bindloss, "lies in the fact that China is not a distinct race any longer. For Mongol one should read mongrel. The Manchus, inferior in mental qualifications, have assumed the authority, the nation is a mixture of Tartars, Tibetans, Burmese, Manchus, Japanese and Arabians, indifferently melted down and far from being welded. China resents outside domination but it is on the cards that aggressive Japan will rule them —unless some European nation steps in and secures the confidence of Chinese statesmen. And the diplomacy of Cathay and that of Europe are as far apart as the poles.

"The nation is divided. Not until the

Digitized by Google

passing of the last generation is union possible to any degree. You, Miss Arden, should know something of that. In your father's time they suddenly tore up the railroads for which they had granted concessions. Here in Shanghai they destroyed the big depot and built a temple on its site in purification and an appeal to the gods to forgive the staining of the Middle Kingdom by the steam go-wagons of the white devils.

"You were perhaps too young then to remember the split between the Boxers and the Imperial party. The Empress herself favored the massacre of foreigners, but Prince Ching and his soldiers fought only half-heartedly. China covets knowledge and power but tradition holds her back."

"I remember little of that, of course," said Claire Arden, "and I am glad to forget everything relating to that horrible time. It seems like a nightmare of childhood."

"But you speak Mandarin?"

"I have not forgotten it entirely." She spoke with diffidence.

Bindloss seemed to note her reply carefully and weigh it and Keeler noticed the Chinese boy who was serving, stop for a moment, rigid as a pointer on scent, his eyes fixed on the girl, his nostrils dilating slightly. Bindloss seemed to have noticed it too. When the boy next left the room he addressed Mrs. Sinclair.

"Is that a new boy, you have? He is admirably trained."

"He came with the new cook," said the hostess. "Chang was Sing's nephew, you know, and he wanted to nurse his uncle."

The consul's brows knitted a trifle and Keeler pondered over the coincidence of Sing's sickness and his nephew's devotion occurring on the night he came to dinner. Evidently Bindloss saw something to windward.

"Just what is your profession, Mr. Keeler?" asked the girl. "Explorer or adventurer?"

"I would rather set it down as plain rover," answered Keeler. "There is a certain stigma attached to the term adventurer, a suggestion of chicanery. Call me a rover, one blessed—or cursed—with wanderlust. An adventurer is one who takes risks for the sake of profit and is not particular about how he makes the profit. I have taken risks, but so far my cosmic stone has rolled too erratically to gather moss enough to make a comfortable landing."

"And, if it had, as a true rover, you would not settle in it. It is the sheer delight in the risk you travel for then, not for gain?"

"I am Scotch on one side, the financial side. Neither am I rich and it costs money to travel in the uncivilized areas. I have to try and make my trips cover expenses."

The look she flashed him held an interest that was neither personal nor casual. There was the hidden intent behind it that puzzled him.

"I too should like to journey to the Back of Beyond," she said. "With my knowledge of the language, could I venture into the interior, Mr. Keeler?"

"Mandarin is the official language, of course, but you would need to learn the special dialects. And you would have to cover race and sex. To be a woman in China is as great a handicap as it is a privilege in the Occident. And you could not change the color of your eyes."

"There you have the advantage. I suppose you have often passed for a native, Mr. Keeler?"

"At times I have had to. But I would not advise your trip."

"You speak as if you would be glad to get home. When are you sailing?"

"Thursday, on the *Pride of Cathay*."

"Why, so am I. That will be very nice."

Keeler saw a puzzled gleam in Dorothy Sinclair's eyes, succeeded by one of triumph. She had not expected her friend to sail so soon. Now she was glad that her matrimonial web seemed to have entangled one of its flies, at least. But Keeler did not believe that any desire for a closer acquaintance on a sex basis animated Claire Arden's booking. Lightly put, as all her questions had been, they smacked to him of cross-examination rather than conversation. Besides. . . .

"I did not notice your name on the passenger list," he said.

She flushed faintly as she lifted her glass.

"I had a friend book for me in case I decided to take the *Cathay*. I suppose he used his own name."

Mrs. Sinclair gave the mystic signal of feminine freemasonry and the three women went into the drawing-room while the Chinese boy served cigars. A piano sounded, not mechanically, but played with

Digitized by Google

sympathy and technique. Then a voice, subdued but velvety and rich:

Un peu de haine, un peu d'amour.
Et puis, bonjour.

Bindloss looked up.

"That is Miss Arden, isn't it, Bob?" he asked. "She is a young lady of many accomplishments. I wish you'd run in and turn her music or something for her, Bob. I'm sorry to usurp the privileges of a guest but I want to have a talk with Keeler and I want to have it right now."

"Sure. Official stuff?"

"In a measure."

"I'm on, or rather I'm off. Don't keep him too long."

KEELER lit his cigar, enjoying it as a long denied luxury.

"Shoot, Bindloss," he said. "I'm curious."

"I'm not. I don't want you to enlighten me on any points. Frankly, I don't think you will. This isn't official, Keeler. Not yet, as far as I am concerned. It would have to be brought to my notice, you see. I am not a Secret Service man. And I am a friend of yours. Consider this as a tip or as a joke on me, whichever you like."

Keeler nodded, accompanying the action with a look of warning. The spring-hinged service-door between the dining-room and pantry was swinging gently forward, barely an inch, as if some one was pressing fingers lightly on the service side.

"Let's go into Bob's den," he suggested. "The boy will want to clear."

"Some one at the door?" asked Bindloss when they were seated in Sinclair's little sanctum. "Which was it. The cook or the new boy?"

"Didn't see."

"Well, it all fits in. You see, Keeler, news filters through Government colonial channels pretty rapidly. We have imbibed some of the Chinese methods, perhaps. Now it has come to me from the legation at Pekin that some one is taking out of the Middle Kingdom something that is of great value to the Chinese Empire. I don't know what it is, save that it is intimately associated with the religious mysteries.

"You know Taoism and Buddhism better than I do and you can understand what importance they attach to any reliquary in a race where a hair of Buddha has a special temple and a tooth can dominate a whole race, as it has in Ceylon. This something is not to leave the country. The ravisher, from their standpoint, has cleverly masked his identity, but they are after him, and the path for national intervention has already been smoothed by hints to our legation from certain boards. The *Hsing-Pu*, the *Wai-wu Pu* are both interested. You know what those are?"

Keeler flicked off the ash of his cigar with a steady hand.

"The Board of Punishments and the Board of Foreign Affairs. They think this ravisher an American?"

"They seem to be sure of it. The *Li Fan Yuen*, that is the Board of Control over Tibet and other Dependencies, started it. They seem to have mulled matters up there. They had a long-set trap for the man and he slipped through. Now—he lowered his voice, "the *erh-mu-kuan* have been sicked on to it."

"'The eyes and ears of the Emperor,' the Chinese Secret Service," said Keeler. "Go on."

"You know what power they have. If they find the man, he will—disappear."

"I should imagine they would be after the mysterious reliquary, as you term it. They are not wonderful, these Pinkertons of Pekin. They have adopted or forestalled, our American police methods, Bindloss. They believe in producing the victim rather than the criminal. A blackmailing lot of sleuths."

Bindloss looked at him more intently.

"They hesitate to take the step, but I should not be surprised if any day I should be officially asked to produce an attested record of any American who has been lately in the interior and, perhaps, hold him until he has proven an alibi. Unofficially I have been already approached in the matter. They are not all fools in the *erh-mu-kuan*. One man is really clever, Hsu-Fuan, the LeCoq of China. He was in Tibet, which, you know, is under Chinese suzerainty."

"I know of the gentleman. But what has this to do with me?"

"I don't know. I don't want to know. I'm taking a good deal of a risk in talking privately with you tonight. But—if you are in this thing—I wouldn't wait for the *Cathay*."

"What would you do? Swim?"

"I'd do something. I wouldn't go to

Digitized by Google

Japan though. Just where Taoism and Buddhism disagree I don't know. They are friendly enough in both priesthoods and I do know that this thing is tied up with the very roots of both religions."

A tap came on the door.

"There's Mrs. Sinclair after my scalp," said Bindloss. "I've tried to give a word to the wise, Keeler. I wish the *Cathay* sailed tonight."

"So do I. I want to get back home. If you are going to round us all up, old chap," said Keeler as he opened the door, "perhaps you could give me another tip. Before it became too official."

It was not their hostess, but the Chinese boy, who came to remind them of their social duties. Keeler had bolted the door and their tones had been too low to arouse fear of having been overheard.

"I'll give you one more tip," said the consul, "though I may be telling you nothing. You are not the only one in this. Some way or another Miss Arden is connected with it though I could account for every move she has made since she arrived here two months ago. You might keep a friendly eye on her."

"Thanks, old chap. You know how I appreciate all this interest." Keeler laid a hand on the other's shoulder as they went toward the drawing-room and the clasp cemented the sincerity of his tone.

They went home in the Bindloss car, dropping Claire Arden at her hotel and Keeler at his club. He bolted the door of his room and clinched it with a little safety device. The long French windows opening on to the gallery were open according to custom and the Venetian blinds were closed and held by a simple latch.

He did not disturb these but stretched another line ankle-high between the lintels. This time it was not of silk but of fine copper wire fastened to stout screw-eyes. He put his shoes on the shelf of his closet and arranged his clothes on hangers after he had donned his pongee pajamas. Under his mattress, close to his right hand, he slid an automatic with the safety off.

He was as tired as a hunting hound after the chase and he meant to sleep, knowing that his senses would subconsciously play sentinel as they had been trained to do. He dozed off puzzling over Claire Arden. She was traveling alone, he had found that out. She had visited former friends and had many letters to Shanghai. And she had been there eight weeks, one week ahead of the cable.

He had told McVea when he expected to arrive at the earliest. And he was two months behind that schedule. Was she a spy? If so, had McVea himself sent her or was she a tool of Hsu-Fuan and the *erh-mu-kuan?* Women as well as men had been known to mingle in Oriental diplomacy for a sufficient price.

IN THE middle of the time between midnight and dawn he awoke, alert, his hand sliding to the handle of his gun. There had been a tiny click between the blinds, the lightest touch to the latch. He breathed on easily and deeply as he had slept, knowing that some one was listening outside.

Slowly, almost imperceptibly the blinds opened and a shadow started to glide into the room. A figure, tripped by the thin wire, fell headlong. Keeler's finger pressed the light button as he sprang from the bed and threw himself upon the twisting form of the agate-eyed chamberman, one hand grasping the serpenty wrist above a long, thin blade, the other smashing down the butt of the pistol behind the intruder's ear.

The boy collapsed and Keeler picked up the slim, limp body and trussed it on the bed with the straps from his portmanteau. When the Chinaman came to, Keeler grinned at him, sitting on the bed beside him, the muzzle of the automatic cold to the other's temple.

"I tell you two time, suppose you fool around me, I make big pidgin trouble. All right, now I kill you."

The boy's eyes showed like a snake's.

"Me no try steal, me no want killee you," he said sullenly.

"No? Brought the knife along just to open the window, I suppose? Better you talk quick why for you come."

"You no killee?"

Keeler shrugged his shoulders.

"Much better you speak quick," he repeated.

"I bring one piece papeh."

"Where?"

"You look my sashee."

Keeler unbuttoned the blouse and found a scrap of rice-paper. There were two characters written upon it.

Digitized by Google

"Who tell you fetch this along?" he demanded.

"One man give along me last night down fan-tan place. He give me ten *tael* suppose I put this along your pillow all same time you sleepee."

"Ah. You *sabe* this man?"

"Suppose I see him one more time, I *sabe*."

"Then you tell him you put paper all same he speak. Now you go."

He unfastened the boy's bonds and put him out of his door. Then he once more studied the scrap of paper. The characters represented two words

入 - enter. 木 - wood.

The English equivalent for them was "coffin." It bore the same significance as a communication signed "The Black Hand" or bearing a skull and cross-bones above the word "Beware."

Keeler did not take it in the light of a death warrant. Those who were after the talisman were not likely to worry about warning him for his own good. It was an ungentle hint that, if he delivered the relic to some one, preferably Bindloss, perhaps, he might be allowed to leave the country unscathed. If not, he would "enter wood" for a permanent residence. It might also, he reflected, be an attempt to force him to "tip" his hand by a scare.

It showed him that Hsu-Fuan was not sure that he was the man, a fact that was his best security as long as suspicion did not turn to action. It was tolerably certain that any step that might be taken concerning the examination of recent travelers who had been into the interior and now wanted to leave the country would be made before the *Cathay* sailed. And all his inclinations, besides his instructions, prompted him not to lose that vessel. Delay was dangerous.

Keeler slowly burned the square of paper. I wonder, he thought, if Jimmy Pardee has been ordered home.

He got out his portmanteau and heavy kit-bag and proceeded to pack, looking reluctantly at his bed.

If ever a man needed a night's sleep, I do, he thought. But there are times when a good run is better than a bad stand.

It was a good game, and he enjoyed it thoroughly, this chess problem with human pieces. It was a case of outguessing, and the man who could look ahead the farthest and open with the best gambit stood the best chance of winning. Hsu-Fuan and the powers behind him gave him credit for ability to foresee at least some of their moves and Keeler was far from blind as to their cleverness. It was a good game, he reflected, and the stake was only a side issue. But, all the same, the Scotch side of him was determined to collect that fifty thousand dollars.

CHAPTER V

THE SAILING OF THE *PRIDE OF CATHAY*

THE *Pride of Cathay* was detained beyond her appointed hour. The passengers wondered and the crew fretted. The gangway had been cast off, goodbys had been said and friends remained aimlessly looking up at the passengers, exchanging spasmodic conversation, but the mooring cables still held her fast to the wharf. The first officer was fuming, the chief engineer infuriate and the captain indignant but the liner stayed motionless.

Claire Arden cornered the purser with a smile as that harassed individual sought to pass her and asked the reason for the delay.

"I don't know, Miss Arden, I'm sure. Something to do with the American consulate. Routine of some kind, I suppose."

He slipped by, vexed at the additional duty suddenly thrust upon him at his busiest hour. Consul Bindloss, accompanied by a Chinaman who showed the red button of the first Kwan, or Mandarin, order above his shrewd, meager face, was making what seemed to the purser a most unnecessary fuss about who was aboard and what passengers, if any, were missing. To the protests of the *Cathay's* skipper the pair were placidly obdurate.

"Confound it," said Captain Herrick, "do you expect me to search the ship? We'll lose the tide."

"You know my authority, Captain," said Bindloss. "I am as sorry as you are but the orders are imperative and Hsu-Fuan must be satisfied."

The purser hurried up, his trim uniform wilted at the collar, his face like a tomato.

"Mr. King Keeler has not come aboard, Captain," he said. "He booked for cabin twelve on the boat deck. He is to share

Digitized by Google

it with Doctor Redding. He has not sent any baggage aboard and he is nowhere to be found."

"Is that sufficient, gentlemen?"

"I am afraid not." It was the silky, purry voice of Hsu-Fuan, high official of the *Tu Ch'a Yuen*, the Secret Censorate of the Chinese Government, the members of which are the "eyes and ears of the emperor," that answered.

Captain Herrick's suavity departed utterly as he ordered a search of the vessel.

"What is the idea?" he exploded. "Is the man a criminal."

"Most assuredly not," said Bindloss. "Personally I know of no reason why he should not make the voyage. Hsu-Fuan would doubtless agree with me after a few words with Mr. Keeler. But he is very anxious to have those few words." He looked at the mandarin, who nodded.

"It is a mere formality," he said.

"There were reasons why no unnecessary publicity should attach to the affair. Hsu-Fuan had a shrewd idea that Keeler had dodged the *Pride of Cathay*. If he was ashore he would be found sooner or later. If he attempted to sail on the *Cathay* or any other vessel the time would be ripe to have him taken ashore for explanations as to his sojourn in the interior. The matter was one to be conducted with diplomacy up to the last moment. And he too, was playing the game several moves ahead.

"I merely am anxious to see Mr. Keeler on behalf of my Government," he said. "I wish to be assured that he is not aboard."

The captain grunted.

"Mr. Keeler has sailed with us several times," he said. "The quartermasters know him well. He didn't come up the gangplank, he isn't on deck or in the cabins, his baggage isn't here. You don't suppose he crawled in through a loading-hatch, do you?"

Hsu-Fuan smiled blandly and folded his arms with his long, lean hands hidden in the wide sleeves of his jacket. His face showed no anxiety though in his brain was predominant the personal issue of the success or failure of his mission to secure the talisman. On the one hand the Yellow Jacket and the peacock's feather of honor, on the other, the silken bowstring of peremptory suicide.

"We will go back with the pilot, Captain," he said. "If that will accommodate you."

The missing passenger was not to be discovered. While the search was on, Bindloss chatted for a few minutes with Claire Arden and evaded her attempts to elucidate the mystery which sooner or later would leak out through the stewards. He gave some papers to the purser and spoke for a moment with the head quartermaster, who had once been a messenger for the consulate. And, when he went over the side with Hsu-Fuan, his face, despite the Oriental's imperturbability, was far the more bland of the two.

CAPTAIN HERRICK had not ceased growling as the *Pride of Cathay* gathered speed from her churning screw, speeding up to eighteen knots in the muddy waters of the Yangtse sediments when a message from his wireless threatened him with apoplexy. He condemned himself to a most unpleasant hereafter as he ordered an acknowledgment of the request of Lieutenant-Commander Pardee of the U. S. Cruiser *Oklahoma* to board the steamer, and gave his orders to the engine-room.

"What in blue blazes do they take this liner for?" he demanded. "A Hudson River excursion boat?" But the request of the commander of one of his country's battleships was not to be ignored. Times in the Orient, always uncertain, were seesawing more than usual of late. He watched the swift launch of the cruiser as it sped toward the *Pride of Cathay* and was deftly hooked on to the emergency companion ladder.

After all, they were not making him lose more speed than was necessary. A nimble junior officer climbed the ladder followed by an agile figure that made the captain gasp as he recognized his former passenger, King Keeler. The Naval officer saluted and presented his superior's compliments.

"Mr. Keeler was aboard the *Oklahoma* last night, sir," he said, "as a guest of Commander Pardee, who wishes to thank you for this accommodation."

A stout portmanteau and other baggage was being hauled to the deck in a netting. Keeler extended his hand to the captain.

"Sorry if I have delayed you," he said. "But it was very necessary for me to be with Commander Pardee until the last available moment." If there was a twinkle

Digitized by Google

in his eyes as he spoke this verisimilitude it shone inwardly.

"Delayed us!" thundered the liner's captain. "Confound you, sir, do you know that the consul and some jack-in-the-box of a mandarin were searching the ship for you?"

"I knew Hsu-Fuan wished to talk with me," said Keeler easily. "But the other matter was the more important."

The junior officer coughed.

"All your baggage is aboard Mr. Keeler, I think," he said suggestively.

"Humph!" Captain Herrick closed the matter in his ejaculation. He did not know what was afoot. But Keeler's sojourn as the guest of the cruiser wrapped him in a certain veiled dignity. He had no great love for Chinese officialdom. He was outside the three-mile limit and he was the master of his own vessel, as much a piece of American estate as the deck of the cruiser itself.

"Present my respects to Commander Pardee," he said. "And tell him that I was glad to accommodate him—and Mr. Keeler."

The officer saluted, descended to his launch, cast off and arrowed back to the cruiser where Keeler had surprised and pleased his friend by dropping in for dinner the night before and staying all night to chat over old times.

"I'll pay for the extra coal, Captain," said Keeler with a smile.

"You'll sit at my table and pay for the wine at dinner, sir," said the skipper. "I didn't know you were in the diplomatic service."

Keeler lowered his voice.

"If any one else asks you that question, Captain," he said confidentially, "tell them that I am not."

He sought out the purser and met Claire Arden, who greeted him with outstretched hand.

"You are a person of greater importance than I thought," she said. "The stewardess tells me that the emperor's nephew was looking for you and now you stop the steamer as if it was a street-car. I am a little afraid of you."

"That can be overcome, I hope," he said. "I imagine you are sitting at the captain's table? Yes. So am I. You must let me do away with that impression."

The purser spoke to him with a deference that was amusing and once more Keeler blessed the luck that had kept Jimmy Pardee at the China Station.

"Who do I room with," he asked. "I tried to get a cabin to myself."

The purser looked deprecatory.

"Couldn't be done," he answered. "I can try and change you, if you like. You are in with Dr. Redding."

Keeler whistled softly.

"The passage was booked in another name. As I said, I can try and arrange it. He's—well you know what they say of him in Shanghai."

Keeler did. The man was notorious in many shady ways. He had resigned from more than one club at the request of the board. He had been known to mix more or less intimately with Orientals who were not "good pidgin." "Card-sharp" and "illicit physician" were two of the mildest terms applied to him and it was rumored that his name was an assumed one. Keeler's first wonder was that the man was daring to return to America.

The story ran that other climes were healthier and freer for the discredited physician. Then his eyes narrowed. He began to suspect that Hsu-Fuan's hand was not played out. The man was a user of drugs, an habitué of certain unsavory quarters of Shanghai — and notoriously hard up.

"Never mind," he told the purser. "We'll try it for a night or two."

The head quartermaster was hovering outside the purser's office. Keeler called him by name.

"I was asked to give you this, sir," said the sailor. An envelope was exchanged for a golden coin. Keeler walked to the rail and quickly opened the note under cover of a boat. It was from Bindloss, on unofficial paper, typewritten and unsigned.

LOOK OUT FOR REDDING.

"Good old Bindloss," said Keeler to himself as he scattered torn scraps of paper on the wind. "A final tip. Now, let me see. Sinclair was on the Board of Directors when Redding was asked to leave the club. It's worth trying."

He walked to the cabin of the wireless operator and dispatched a message. As he came out he almost ran into Redding himself, puffy of face and stomach

Digitized by Google

though otherwise gaunt, shabbily dressed, furtive-eyed, bearing an air of blustering familiarity.

"Ah, Keeler," he said. "We are to be cabin-mates, I see. Going through?"

Keeler nodded curtly. Then he smiled and proffered a leather case.

"Have a cigar?" he asked. "And a drink? The bar is open, I imagine."

He tucked his arm within Redding's and marched him away. The doctor seemed to go along with a queer mingling of satisfaction and hesitation. Keeler talked as they went quickly along. He was wondering whether the operator was sending his message in the crackling discharge from the aerials and also whether the doctor knew Morse.

CHAPTER VI

THE HAND IN THE NIGHT

THE *Cathay* was a hundred miles from port and Keeler and Claire Arden were aggravating appetites already hearty, by a promenade before the first gong sounded for dinner. Clear-eyed and lithe-limbed, the girl kept easy pace with Keeler's swinging stride, her looks backed by such evident vitality and enjoyment of the sheer fact of living that she was a delight to the eye and an inspiration to the spirit. She was far from the "clinging-vine" variety of women, of which type there were several on board; and Keeler felt sure that a very sane mind dwelt in her eminently healthy body.

Ahead of them, with a face lined and pale, redeemed from plainness only by a pair of luminous eyes, walked a woman who had been in the Orient working for the emancipation of Chinese women; making about as much impression on the national customs as a fly upon an elephant, an irritant if it happens to light upon certain sensitive spots, generally a nuisance, but practically unnoticed.

"She means well," said Claire Arden, "but her devotion to the 'Cause' sends her free-lancing off into a land of which she does not even know the manners."

"Women have probably had as much influence on Chinese affairs as those of any country, France not barred," said Keeler. "Witness the Empress Tsz'e An and Empress Tsz'e Hsi. True, Li Hung Chang played Disraeli to the latter's Victoria but she was certainly emancipated. I have dealt with a lot of Chinese women of excellent capacity in business.

"The mother of a Chinese man rules his home until she dies and then his wife in her older years is absolutely venerated. The son who does not honor his mother outrages public opinion. But you spoke of the 'Cause,' by which I suppose you mean Suffrage. Do you subscribe to it?"

"Do you?" she countered. "I have not thought much of it. I am concerned rather with the effect. Women have equal opportunities, surely it is their own fault if they do not wield equal influence. What I want is to establish my own individuality. If there is any real I, I want to make my ego count. 'To,' as the slang goes, 'make it on my own.'"

"How about partnerships? I mean of man and woman."

"Find me two of similar aims and physically mated and I don't see why they shouldn't get along famously. But the combination is a rare one."

It was evident, thought Keeler, that the question of sex attraction had not yet disturbed her. Talking with her was a good deal like talking to a younger man, only she was far more matured than a boy of her own age would have been. And—he glanced at the gracious curves of her figure outlined by the warm breeze, the glory of her hair—there was a difference.

She had said nothing more about the manner of his coming aboard and he scored that in her favor. Her talk, even on comparatively commonplace subjects, was illuminated by an originality that stimulated a like response. He had never met a girl like her before and the discovery was a perpetual challenge, heightened by the mystery of the hidden hostility which he still felt she held toward him, well covered but latent.

A deck-steward came up to them and saluted, handing Keeler a message.

"Wireless, sir," he said.

It was the answer from Sinclair. There were only a few words and Keeler read them after the girl insisted.

"If it wasn't important it wouldn't have come by wireless," she said. But she displayed no curiosity as Keeler glanced twice over the brief sentences, fixing them in his mind, crumpled the paper into a ball and tossed it over the rail into the wastebasket of the Pacific Ocean.

Digitized by Google

The gong sounded and they turned toward the deck-door of the entrance to the staircase leading to the dining-saloon. As they reached it Redding came up with a smile for Keeler and a leering look at the girl, which she quietly ignored.

Keeler had found that Redding, as first-comer, had preempted the lower berth of their cabin. His own baggage had been placed in the upper bunk and, when he entered, Redding was putting away the meager wardrobe from his solitary suitcase. He felt qualmish, he had told Keeler, and was going to lie down.

Now, Keeler saw from certain face-marks and the glassy look in the man's eyes that his incipient seasickness had been only an excuse for drug indulgence, either in opium, or, more probably, morphine, the modern Chinese substitute for the poppy extract under the ban of the imperial edict.

"I'll see you later, Redding," he said easily and, passing the girl ahead of him through the door, followed.

Redding stood looking after them with a mirthless grin that showed his discolored teeth, filled with tarnished gold.

"Who is your unpleasant acquaintance?" asked the girl.

"Just what he looks," said Keeler. "He is an unsavory individual and I have the misfortune to be cabined with him."

"Can't you change?"

"Perhaps. But one can't choose fellow-passengers at this season."

"He has the eyes of a weasel," said the girl with a little shudder. "Really there ought to be a social censor aboard."

At their table the captain greeted them and challenged Keeler to pay the imposed penalty for holding up the ship. Keeler laughed and called for the wine-card. Ah-lung, who had smuggled him aboard the junk that had taken him to the *Oklahoma*, had bought the diamonds with which he had stocked his caravan. So he had not been obliged to draw on McVea.

But, in the glances bestowed upon him across the glasses abrim with the bubbling liquid he had provided, Keeler saw that his arrival had given him a notoriety that was not merely presently disagreeable but would blossom into a story that the water-front reporters would grab with delight at San Francisco.

He showed nothing of his aversion as he bowed to the nodding heads. San Francisco was a long way off. There were six thousand miles of voyaging ahead, six thousand miles of companionship with Claire Arden.

In the following days he saw little of Redding. He left the cabin to him for his afternoon indulgences. When he was not there, Redding divided his time between the bar and the smoking-room, where, it was said, he played a wonderful game of pirate-bridge. Keeler spent his hours on deck with Claire Arden. Redding usually turned in after he did and Keeler was up in the morning long before the doctor.

His vigilance was perpetual. At Nagasaki and Yokohama he went ashore with the girl but confined his wanderings to the most perfunctory of tourist routes. But, neither ashore nor at sea, did he see anything to make him apprehensive, save the fact that there seemed nothing to be afraid of. If his suspicions of Redding were well founded, he imagined that the man, with his moral courage weakened by the drug, was slowly screwing up his nerve toward the accomplishment of his ends—unless he was trying to dull any mistrust Keeler might hold, before he acted.

Some of the passengers were staying over at Honolulu and Keeler made arrangements to secure a cabin by himself; which the purser thought he could promise him. The strain of continuous half-sleep was beginning to wear upon him and he wanted a few nights of complete rest before he landed, convinced that his troubles were far from over, however clear the prospect.

THE night before the *Pride of Cathay* was due to arrive at Honolulu, Keeler sauntered to the bows, waiting for Claire Arden to make an appearance. She had given him many opportunities to practically monopolize her society and their friendship was a thing tacitly understood.

He lit his cigar and looked down upon the phosphorescence that flamed about the liner's stem and streamed back, leaving a far trail as she surged through the warm night beneath a blaze of stars toward the Paradise of the Pacific. He had resolved to take an account of his attitude toward the girl. She had become more than a mere sea-comrade, she bid fair to be an important factor in his life. He realized that she had already entirely eclipsed his pet hobby, the

Digitized by Google

rich deposit of jade in the Burmese river-bed.

By some quirk of his nature he found it hard to concentrate on the analysis of his feelings toward her.

"I wonder," he asked himself, "what a man could do at home with fifty thousand dollars? Perhaps a country place. One might raise horses. There is money in good stock. And she is fond of horses."

"Pshaw!" He flung away his half-smoked cigar with the exclamation. Was he, King Keeler, the rover, to be tamed so easily, to contemplate losing his liberty without a shudder. Rovers never settled down. There was Nielson, there was Howard the orchid hunter, Walton, who had made a vow to shoot and fish around the world until he had made trophies of all the known game. There were a dozen others, a score of them, rovers all. Off the trail they had talked of settling down—some time—and they had never done so.

The mood would pass. They knew nothing of each other. Besides, there was the shadow between them. There were times when he caught her looking at him curiously as she lay, professedly dozing, in the deck-chair next to his. There were times when she rebuffed him, other times when she was almost intimate. But the thing would end in San Francisco, he promised himself, knowing that he would never forget her, that there would never be another woman just like her.

The wind strengthened a trifle and he pulled down the visor of his yachting cap more firmly. It already fitted him beyond the power of anything short of a hurricane to lift; he had seen to that carefully when he bought it. And, between the layers of the patent-leather peak, the talisman lay smooth to the curve. The heels of his shoes had begun to wear down and he had been forced to discard them.

He hesitated to light a fresh cigar, momentarily expecting the girl to join him. What was it she had said about wanting to develop her own individuality? An unusual attitude for a woman but not an unreasonable one. Under the arch of the sky, aflame with the radiance of a myriad worlds, the affairs of this planet and his own in particular seemed suddenly petty to him. After all he was merely doing another man's bidding. He was not carving out his own life.

He felt the compulsion of his own ego and listened to the call of his destiny. It did not speak plainly but there was an urge to start the grand adventure, to walk his own trail. Familiarity with many religions had not lessened his belief in the infinite nor weakened his creed that every man played his part, if only that of a mote in the sunbeam, and that effort was progress.

To Keeler, the tangible hope of immortality lay in the offspring of man or woman, children born of the best there was in them, flesh-and-blood children with inherited instincts, or mental progeny. Something to hand down, something accomplished that was worthy of the prime of his own cosmos. The fifty thousand dollars that he was earning was only the price of another's whim, the wild notion of another man's ambition.

And it came home to him suddenly that on the ship that glided on the element midway between the core of the world and the vaster ocean of the sky on which swam a million globes, their courses set and determined by a Master Will, breathed the woman who was his complement, the mate assigned to him. Alone, his life had been an erratic pilgrimage; with her it would be a definite path to worth-while achievement. His present adventure was a tawdry thing, tarnished with earthy deposits. But his word was given for its accomplishment and his word was a part of himself. He could not vilify it without a deterioration of his own powers.

"Star-dreaming?"

He turned to meet her.

"I thought you were dreaming in your berth," he said. "I had given you up."

"I have been talking with Wing-Sang. He is a delightful old merchant. A dealer in furs in New York. He has a brother in Honolulu who is a partner in the Wing-Wo-Wang Importing Company, immensely rich, with a native wife and children enough to number on the fingers of both hands. I talked Mandarin to him and he grew very friendly. He has been dreadfully seasick and this is his first day out."

"Ah!" Wing-Sang was one of the Chinese aboard that Keeler had promised himself to keep an eye upon. He had done so, with the exception of Sang who had been so sick. They all seemed to be harmless merchants but there were societies in China to which men belonged by duress rather

Digitized by Google

than choice and the webs of the *ehr-mu-kum* stretched far.

"What did you talk about?" he asked her.

"Not the emancipation of women! Though his brother's wife seems to have a pretty free rein. He has promised to see that I get some things in Honolulu from his brother's store at special prices. As it is American territory I can get them in duty free. Of course something has been already paid on them, but nothing like what I should have to pay. And I have an invitation to a dinner at his brother's house. We shall have time enough while we are ashore, I suppose. Will you come with me?"

"I?"

"Yes, he asked me to bring a friend or friends. Wing-Sang is for all the world like my guardian, witty, rather fussy, bothered with rheumatism, worrying about his family at home in New York. His wife wants him to buy an automobile and he wanted to know which I thought the best car. He has all sorts of presents for his nephews and nieces. Will you come?"

Keeler hesitated for a moment. It sounded all right. The girl's interest seemed natural enough.

"I will try to," he temporized. "I can not tell what instructions may be awaiting me."

"Oh, I forgot you were not a free agent." Her voice held the hurt of offense but Keeler dropped the subject.

It was nearly midnight when he escorted her below and the decks were deserted. He looked into the smoking-room on his way to his own cabin. The usual enthusiasts were busy with their whist but Redding was not among them. Keeler found him asleep in his bunk, his loose mouth open beneath the close-clipped mustache that Nature had intended mercifully to hide the sensuous lips, his face puffy, his eyes deep-caverned.

Keeler undressed and climbed into his berth, not neglecting his usual precautions. Before he switched out the main lights he tested the reading-globe in the wall by his head and tucked in his automatic close to his hand beneath the mattress.

Below Redding breathed stentorously, apparently under the lingering influence of the drug. The ocean was calm save for the ground-swell and the port-hole was open. He lay watching the heave of the sea-line against the stars and listening to the surge of the water against the steamer's side. The course was almost due east; his cabin was on the starboard side and he could see the Southern Cross slowly tilting to the waves. The lift of the horizon and its fall, the steady rush of the water, produced a gentle hypnosis. He saw the lower star of the constellation dip and rise and sink again before he lost consciousness.

He woke to the feel of a cloth upon his face and the light pressure of fingers above it, molding it to his mouth and nose. At his first instinctive gasp the pungent fumes of chloroform filled his nostrils, the membranes of his throat flamed as the essence of the lethal drug was sucked into his lungs.

CHAPTER VII

REDDING'S ADDRESS-BOOK

KEELER had pushed back all the bedclothes save a sheet. He struck out with his left hand, clutching at the pressing fingers and tearing them loose while his right fumbled for the reading-globe. They found it and turned the switch, dropping to the butt of his gun as he flung himself desperately upward and outward, descending upon the shoulders of Redding and kicking out with all his strength. As Redding staggered backward Keeler was upon him, bearing the doctor's flabby body to the floor and kneeling on his chest.

He was in no mood for mercy. All his splendid powers coordinated in an explosion of force that was resistless. He found Redding's throat and sank his fingers into the other's windpipe, jamming his automatic, none too gently, into the doctor's face. Redding struggled in a brief burst of energy and subsided. As Keeler took the pressure from his gullet he lay with closed eyes.

"No shamming," said Keeler. "Open your eyes. Now then, one peep and I'll let the rotten life out of you."

Redding's lids lifted to a look of venomous chagrin. Keeler reached for the saturated cloth. Beyond his fingers he saw something else and changed his mind, picking up the object. It was a hypodermic syringe, loaded, the piston withdrawn ready for use.

"Get up, you hound," he said. "Now stand with your back to me."

Digitized by Google

Redding got slowly to his feet, a clumsy figure distorted with the paunch of indulgence, flaccid with the ravages of the drug. His pajamas hung loosely upon him, long-sleeved, dragging about his ankles. Keeler pulled down the cuffs and tied them in a double knot.

"Get into your bunk," he ordered, and watched him crawl into the berth like a whipped cur into a kennel, lying on his back while Keeler strapped his feet together with a belt. He had put the syringe on the wash-stand. He looked at it with a grin.

"I fancy you were going to inject this into me while you overhauled my things," he said. "The dose may be a small one for you but we'll try it and reverse the tables. If you squeak, my blackleg friend, I'll finish you here and now. Turn over."

Redding obeyed with a suppressed groan of mortification muffled by the pillows as Keeler set a knee in the small of his back, unfastened the knots in the cuffs and stripped back one sleeve. Redding's fore-arm was peppered with the punctures of his vice. Keeler pinched up some flesh and squirted in the dose. Then he turned Redding upon his back again and tied his wrists more securely, standing above him and grimly watching the drug work.

He knew that many morphine habitués were used to as many as fifteen grains daily. Redding, he calculated, would hardly have dared to give him more than half a grain. He would not want a murder on his hands. That amount would not last long in a body already tolerant of the drug.

He set swiftly to work going through Redding's belongings. The suitcase contained only a scanty wardrobe and a supply of morphine tablets in tiny glass tubes. He slipped these into the pocket of his coat hanging on the hook beside his berth. Unless Redding procured more at Honolulu, these, with the syringe, would make the doctor his slave for the rest of the trip.

The clothes yielded nothing. He turned his attention to the bunk. He lifted Redding's eyelids disclosing the contracted pupils which showed that he was under the full influence of the morphine. Beneath the mattress Keeler unearthed a pocketbook and a little book margined alphabetically for addresses. In the wallet were nearly five hundred dollars. These he left untouched, turning on the full light and sitting on the lounge to examine the note-book.

It was a worth-while find. His eyes gleamed as he read the addresses, some in English and some in Chinese script. The names belonged to residents of quarters of Hongkong, Pekin and Shanghai that were in ill-repute even with the natives. Some were scattered through other cities. Keeler imagined them the names of members of some secret society. Under the letter "K" his own name was registered and beneath it the initials "C. A." and the date of the sailing of the *Cathay*.

Those will stand for Claire Arden, Keeler pondered. The fool, he can't trust his own memory any longer. He has small business playing the game he has chosen. He turned on. The next written page disclosed an address on West Forty-ninth Street.

"N" was the initial heading. New York!

He completed the book and went back to the suit-case. He was not satisfied that he had found everything. The lid was lined with canvas and arranged for the holding of shirts. Keeler ran his fingers carefully over the lining and gave a little grunt of content.

There were papers there. He got his pocket-knife from his clothes and ripped away the cloth. The documents lay close. There were two of them, on thin rice-paper. Keeler smiled with satisfaction as he deciphered the characters. One was a letter signed by Hsu-Fuan himself commending Redding to the good offices of one Sing-Lee of Honolulu as "a brother."

That is the local head of the secret order, thought Keeler. I shall look out for Sing-Lee. I imagine Redding was to hand over the talisman if he found it and Sing Lee may have some idea of finishing the job by arranging for me to "enter wood" at Honolulu. As Redding has not got the golden petal, Sing-Lee may become still more active.

The second document was an order on the same Sing-Lee for a thousand dollars after "Redding made delivery."

Cheap at the price, Keeler thought, folding up the papers. He dressed and stood looking down at Redding whose body was beginning to twitch. It would be an hour before he could articulate, two before he could reason, Keeler decided. And he wanted a little conversation with the doctor at the earliest moment.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VIII

THE WING-WO-WANG IMPORTING COMPANY

THE sudden dawn streamed through the porthole, paling the electric cluster, when Keeler roused the night-steward and ordered a pot of hot coffee, receiving it at the door himself. He poured out two cups and, loosening the hands of Redding, ordered him to drink it. The doctor made no motion and Keeler's voice turned to command.

"I'll stand for no nonsense, Redding," he said. "I hold the whip and I'll do more than crack it if you don't behave. Drink that coffee and rouse up that addled brain of yours. You'll need to pay close attention to what I am saying." He swallowed his own share as Redding sullenly obeyed.

"What are you going to do?" demanded the latter.

"You know and I know what happened last night and what would have happened if I had slept a little sounder. We'll not discuss it. I have your papers and I know exactly who employed you and what you expected to find. You would not have found it, if that is any solace to you. First we'll settle what you are going to do—and not do.

You will stay in this cabin unless I am unable to get other satisfactory accommodations. In that case you will get out and secure the best you can. Buy in with some officer if necessary. You have the price. You will not leave this cabin until the *Cathay* starts for San Francisco. And you will keep out of my way for the rest of the trip. I should advise you to return on the steamer to Shanghai, or, if it suits you better, stop in Japan."

Redding's face showed annoyance, then fear and finally dogged defiance.

"You can't keep me in my cabin," he said. "As to what happened last night, there will be two sides to that story. I don't think you care for the publicity I can give you."

"I can furnish a little publicity that I think will make you see the reason, Mr. Adler, or rather Dr. Adler," said Keeler.

Redding's face grew livid.

"What the devil are you driving at?" he asked.

"You. I have your record, Adler. Most people remember your case. The federal authorities are after you as well as the civil. And their memories are long, as long as those of your bondsmen who lost ten thousand dollars when you sneaked out of the country. I thought you were over-venturesome when you said you were booked for San Francisco. Why, man, they will be waiting for you on the wharf. Uncle Samuel does not forget and there will be some one there who will likely recognize you even if I do not send a wireless ahead."

"—— you, I'll——"

"Do nothing but what I tell you. You expected to get through with me and leave the steamer at Honolulu. You will not be welcomed by Sing-Lee, I fancy, and the brothers of the *T'au-t'ie* have good eyes. Better stay on board, Adler."

"I tell you, I can't, Keeler. I must chance it in Honolulu. You say I should not have found what I wanted. Hsu-Fuan said different but he may have been wrong." He sipped at the dregs of his cup and Keeler poured him out some more coffee. "But I daren't go back to China unsuccessful. I daren't land in San Francisco. Japan would be as bad. My God, Keeler, I've got to land. And you shan't stop me." His voice rose to a shrill whine.

"You can hardly expect sympathy from me," said Keeler. He felt none for the man and did not intend to worry about his troubles. "I don't care a snap what happens to you but, if you attempt to land in Honolulu, don't forget that it is American territory. I shall take care to have you held under surveillance while they communicate with the mainland. You'll stay in this cabin if I have to dose you with morphine."

Adler licked his fevered lips.

"You've got my morphine?" he asked. "Then give it to me and I'll do what you say. I'll risk it. Maybe I can get ashore at San Francisco somehow. But give me back my needle and the pellets. You must. It's torture to me to go without it. I need a dose now. It's life to me, Keeler. Give it to me."

Keeler looked contemptuously at the man, craven with fear, begging for the thing that had lost him whatever manhood he once possessed. His face was working and his fingers picking at the bedding while his body twitched unmercifully with the desire that racked him. Keeler shook his head and

Digitized by Google

Adler tried to spring at him, forgetting his bound ankles, toppling from the bunk and dragging himself to Keeler's feet.

"I've got to have it, I tell you. I'll tell you everything, do anything for you, only give it to me."

"How much do you take?" asked Keeler.

"I'm up to twenty grains a day now. Injections of two grains and twice a day I swallow the pellets. I didn't take any last night, I dared not. What you gave me is only a torment. You devil, you—ah!"

He had seen the hypodermic syringe lying on the washstand and writhed toward it. Keeler dragged him back.

"Get into your bunk," he said. "I am going to help you. I am going to taper you off. You can have a grain now and more later as I see fit. But, if you attempt to leave this room you get none."

Adler watched him hungrily as he took the dose from one of the tiny phials.

"Make it two," he whimpered. "Two, Keeler and I'll tell you all I know."

"I know it already. Here." The other bolted the grain of comfort and the frightful twitching gradually ceased.

"You are right," he said more composedly. "You hold the whip and I'm your dog. I'll stay on board."

He closed his eyes and seemed to pass under the influence of the morphine. Keeler dressed leisurely and left the cabin to find the steward and tell him that Dr. Redding did not wish to be disturbed.

"He has had a bad night," he said and gave the man a tip.

The fellow responded with a knowing look.

"I understand, sir," he said. "I'll see he's left alone. Purser tells me you are going to change cabins, sir."

Keeler passed on without comment. The islands were in sight. They had already passed Kauai and the quartermaster told him that they would be docked by noon and leave that evening.

Down in Number Twelve, Redding, alias Adler, tossed restlessly on his bunk. The grain that Keeler had given him had done little more than relieve the ravening appetite within him.

"The devil," he muttered. "The devil, who thinks he knows all. He may sing another tune. And he has my morphine. Blast his soul in ——. I may get my revenge but the price—the price is too high."

KEELER met Claire Arden at breakfast.

"You look pale," she said. "Didn't you sleep well?" He looked at her intently wondering whether the pitch of her voice suggested concern or curiosity based upon expectancy.

"I passed a very satisfactory night, thank you," he answered. "But I find I shall not be able to go to that dinner with you. I shall be very busy for a while."

She looked puzzled. Then her face cleared.

"Ah, more messages," she said. "I had forgotten the wireless, which was silly of me as I want to send word ashore to some friends myself."

As they gained the deck she walked toward the wireless-room. Keeler left her at the door and as he passed the window, he saw her smiling at the susceptible operator, already a hopeless devotee at her shrine.

"Now I would give quite a little to know," he told himself, "whether she is really sending a message or finding out from that easily pumped well inside there, whether I received one."

She rejoined him in a few minutes.

"I think I shall go to Wing-Sang's," she said. "I have invited a Honolulu friend to go with me. I am a bit mercenary in the matter for I really want to get those things. Are you going to be busy all the time? Because if you are not, you might meet me at the Wing-Wo-Wang Bazaar later on. That is if, you care to. I should like to have your judgment on the things I pick out. At four o'clock."

Keeler did not want to appear discourteous and he knew that any excursion with her would be a delight. The appearance of her initials in the little note-book worried him. If their entry meant that she was in jeopardy, suspected in some way of being mixed up in the securing of the talisman, perhaps because she could talk Mandarin and had lived in Pekin, perhaps because he had met her so soon after his arrival in Shanghai; he wanted to look out for her and see her safe on board again. So he accepted the appointment and while they gazed at the loom of the Waianae Range that lofted on the island of Oahu, his mind went on with the problem.

Why had Claire Arden arrived in Shanghai coincident with the date on which he had first thought it possible to arrive, and

Digitized by Google

why had she stayed in Shanghai until he came and then left on the first steamer? He hated the suspicion, the vague hint of danger that insisted upon rising between them, but the hint was insistent. Her own behavior had fostered it and now her initials were in the book with the names of the brethren of the *T'au-t'ie*. So was his own name, for that matter. It was a sorry coil, he could not think of the girl plotting against him, the idea was ungenerous, against his own heart's desire—and yet——

"We don't get the spectacular entrance of the steamers that come from the north by Koko Head and Diamond Head and along Waikiki Beach but I love this just as much, don't you?"

Keeler dragged his mind clear of the seethe of suspicion and looked at the land with eyes that saw.

They were passing Barber's Point, well in toward the reef. Ahead lay Pearl-Harbor Locks, backed by the emerald flash of the cane plantations. The saddle of red soil between the two ranges of Oahu showed vivid as the girl's hair, sloping up eastward to the crests of the Koolau ridge, purple and green in shade and sun, every hue of amethyst and jade, the lazy cream-white and pearl-gray trade clouds piling through the gap of the Pali pass. Near the dock the water was alive with diving boys, and the pier-sheds disgorged people on to the sunny planking with wreaths of flowers for expected friends.

"There is my friend," said Claire Arden suddenly waving to a young woman who returned the greeting by swinging a carnation lei.

Keeler was looking out for Chinese among the crowd but did not see any. The merchants aboard thought too much of the dignity of their families to have them come down to the public wharf. The fact that the girl had really sent a message was a tiny relief. I am altogether too suspicious, he decided, but it is part of my business, or rather of McVea's. I shall be glad when I am my own man again.

Claire Arden's friend led her off to a smart roadster and Keeler, ignoring the taxi- and hack-drivers, walked up Fort Street and turned west on Hotel, strolling tourist-wise toward the Oriental quarter beyond the Nuuanu stream. He knew the city fairly well and made his way directly toward the address of Sing-Lee.

The number was displayed on the fanlight of a narrow doorway. The building was of brick, high and narrow with one store on the ground floor that was devoted to the sale of Chinese goods of all sorts, a wholesale warehouse unfrequented by the whites. In the entrance a number of signs in Chinese characters proclaimed that a doctor, a fortune-teller, a jeweler and a cigar dealer had their offices on the two lower floors. The upper stories were probably part of a lodging-house, he decided, with the exception of the third, occupied by a club.

Keeler seldom used his knowledge of Chinese save when in the country itself. He had found a supposed ignorance a valuable asset. Therefore he asked no questions but walked up the wooden stairs hoping to find some trace of Sing-Lee. He wanted to know what the man's ostensible business was and, if possible, get a good look at him. He had acquired the power of distinguishing the facial differences of Orientals, no easy task for the average Caucasian and he might want to be able to recognize Sing-Lee at some future time.

On the second landing a Chinaman lounged smoking a short bamboo-pipe. He looked indifferently at Keeler and drew aside, standing by the newel post of the dingy, scarred balustrade. Keeler heard the faint ting of a bell above-stairs. The man was a lookout for the club which was probably a gambling-den. He went on. At the head of the stairs the door that faced him was semi-glazed. On the frosted glass was outlined the distorted face of a ravenous animal.

It was the symbol of the *T'au-t'ie*, a common enough ornament on ancient vases, adopted by the society to which Redding belonged, a low branch of some Masonic order, its uses distorted, part club, part fraternity with political and social uses intertwined. Door and wall seemed blank but Keeler was sure that he was under observation. He put on a look of bewilderment and retraced his steps to where the lookout still lounged.

"You *sabe* Sing-Lee?" he asked.

"What for you want Sing-Lee? Plenty Sing-Lee I *sabe*. You want catchee laundly, you want buy some Manila cigar? Suppose you want buy some Chinee shoe maybe you catchum Sing-Lee in shoppee." He pointed down-stairs.

Digitized by Google

Keeler nodded.

"I want buy Chinee slipper," he said. "One man he tell me come Sing-Lee, all same this number this street. I go shop now. Thank you."

He went into the store and bargained perfunctorily for some grass-woven slippers pretending, as was often the case, that a friend had told him where he could get them wholesale. Sing-Lee, they told him, was not in. His connection with the store was evidently a blind and he had found out the main thing he wanted, Sing-Lee's tie-up with the secret society. He had held an idea that he would find the bazaar of the Wing-Wo-Wang Company at this spot. He asked for its location and was told that it was a retail establishment on King Street.

SO THERE was nothing to be afraid of in that direction. Wing-Sang seemed to be innocuous and he had wronged the girl. But he could not make himself sure of that. Because Keeler had small experience with women he judged them better than he believed he did. Perhaps the best chum he had ever had once warned him against women with brains.

"Your fluffy, kitteny girl may scratch but she would rather purr and be fed up on kindness. And her scratches don't amount to much, one rather likes them as a sign of spirit. Then there is the real woman, the kind mothers are made out of because they want to be mothers, the sort who are maternal even to their sweethearts, the kind who ache to do something for you, share something, good luck or ill, with you, and who always find the soft spot in your heart, the boy in the toughest man. I know there are such women, Keeler, old chap, because I had a mother myself,, but I have never known one. If I meet one, or you do, tie to her if she'll have you.

"But look out for the woman with brains. A man isn't a fair match for her. He's handicapped with a woman from the start. Sex gave her a thousand wiles to make a gill net that stretches across the whole current of your life and when she has brains to back her use of them, look out."

Thus had spoken Waldron, the gold-hunter, when the two had met up in Mandalay once upon a time. Keeler had thought him a cynic, a man who had been stung and thought himself inoculated because he had chosen the wrong kind of woman or the right kind had not chosen him. Keeler knew that women could be as low down as men but it was not fair to judge the sex by exceptions and he did not believe that Claire Arden was bad in any sense of the word. There were suspicious circumstances but they might be all colored by his own position. And he wanted to give her the benefit of the doubt. He would go to the bazaar.

But first he had other things to do. He turned seaward and angled his way toward the main streets, stopping at the police station where he asked for the deputy sheriff, Wilmington, with whom he had had friendly dealings whenever he passed through Honolulu.

A tall, slimly athletic *hapa-haole* (half-white) well set up in his lieutenant's uniform, stuck his head out of the door of his office and hailed him.

"What do you know of Sing-Lee, who hangs out in the building of the *T-au-t'ie* Society?" asked Keeler, after the first greetings.

"You haven't been bucking the tiger in that joint and got bitten, have you?' grinned the officer. "You couldn't, if you just came in on the *Cathay*. But it's funny you've asked about Sing-Lee because he's wanted and my men are out looking for him right now. How did you get mixed up with him?"

"I have a message for him from a friend in Shanghai," said Keeler. "What has he been up to?"

"Everything. He runs a crooked gambling-joint but that is the least of his sins. He is a general go-between with American affairs for a lot of Chinese societies, commercial and otherwise. Looks out for the gamblers when they are arrested, covers up opium-passing, fixes things for them with lawyers over leases and when they run against us.

No insurance agent can place a policy in Chinatown unless Sing-Lee is consulted, aside from the big merchants, and there have been a lot of them issued lately and altogether too many fires in connection. That's what we want him for now and we've got the evidence on him. If he isn't deported we'll tuck him away on the reef at Iwilei for a spell. He has been there before on a short term."

"Got his picture handy?"

Digitized by Google

"Sure. In the chief's office. Want to see it?"

Keeler transferred the image of the piratical, unscrupulous face to his brain.

"I hope you get him," he said fervently. "It would be a good thing to have that alley closed. There's one thing more. I can't tell you my business, Wilmington. It isn't in your line. But I've run afoul of the *T'au-t'ie* and I'm not taking any more chances than I have to. I sail on the *Cathay* this evening. I'm going to take a car ride out to the Aquarium, mainly to dodge my friends.

"You know how it is at a port of call. See one and the rest get offended. At four o'clock I'm going to meet one of our passengers and help her choose some vases or something. The date is at the Wing-Wo-Wang Bazaar. I don't imagine there can be any possible danger there but one never knows what may turn up and I have some ground for suspicion. If I don't phone in by five o'clock will you look me up?"

"Of course. But we've nothing against Wing-Wo-Wang and Company."

KEELER chatted for a few moments longer and gave Wilmington the inlaid cigaret case he had brought him from Shanghai. Then he took the Waikiki car, strolled through Kapiolani Park, looked at the brilliant display in the Aquarium tanks and got back to town in time to walk into Wing-Wo-Wang's exactly at four o'clock.

There were a few customers in the place, inspecting the display of teak and ivory carvings, brocades and porcelain, served by the deferential Chinese clerks. He saw Claire Arden at a counter examining some vases and discussing them with a portly, prosperous man in dark-purple silk whom she introduced as Wing-Yup, brother of Wing-Sang.

"I want your judgment on some mandarin coats," said the girl. "You said they were on the next floor?"

"The best ones, yes," answered the merchant. "We have some here but they are—for tourists. Here is the elevator."

Claire Arden stepped into the cage and Keeler followed. Wing-Yup temporarily excused himself.

"The boy will take you up," he said in his perfect English. "I have to oversee a shipment. I will be with you in a moment."

The operator started his clutch and the car moved downward.

"I thought he said top-side," said Keeler sharply.

"Me, I got speakee some one," said the boy as the elevator reached the basement.

He made a motion toward the drum of the lift and stepped out of the cage, shutting the door behind him. A sudden doubt struck Keeler and he tried the catch. It clicked back but the door remained fast. The grille was too close for him to reach the outside of the lock. The boy had disappeared and the car began to move swiftly downward once more in a shaft lined with metal. At the bottom was darkness save for the light that came from above, barely sufficient for him to see the alarmed look on the girl's face.

She uttered an exclamation and clutched at his arm. Her fingers were trembling and Keeler wondered if it was from excitement or fear. The primary cause was apparent. The back of the elevator was advancing, thrusting them inexorably forward, sliding smoothly in horizontal grooves midway of the sides, projected by a steel arm. The front door had moved silently to one side and they faced a square of blackness into which they were resistlessly pushed by the hidden mechanism.

Keeler gave one shout, useless as he felt it to be, before they were moved forward into the darkness. He felt dirt underfoot. The door of the elevator shut automatically and, with a light clang of metal, the light that had shone down the shaft vanished. A sliding section of floor had shut them completely off from the upper stories.

"What does this mean?" gasped the girl.

"Ask your friend Wing-Sang," answered Keeler savagely. He had been trapped after all. Was Claire Arden in the plot? Her fright seemed genuine enough. They were prisoners below the street level and he was wearing the cap with the talisman in the visor. The possibility of search worried him most. The petal was well concealed but a close inspection would reveal a suspicious rigidity between the layers.

There was nothing to do but await the next move. He felt for his automatic. It was gone, taken from his hip-pocket by some light-fingered Chinese expert, probably as he had stood beside the girl at the counter.

"Are they going to rob us—or kidnap us for ransom?" she asked.

Digitized by Google

"I don't know about us. But they are after me. I am seventeen kinds of a fool.

"Why do they want you?"

"Because they think I have something they want very badly."

"And have you?"

They spoke in whispers and her question was dulled of special emphasis. He did not answer it. Why did she ask? If the petal was found did she hope to gain immunity? Did she know of its existence? He did not tell her about the arrangement he had made with Wilmington. Supercaution was necessary if they were going to get out of the mess.

The place had the faint, sour smell that is inseparably linked with the Orient. The girl clung to his arm.

"It is all my fault," she said. "I have brought you into a trap. But I had no idea of it."

"Of course not." Keeler could not keep the irony from his speech. He felt as well as heard the girl catch her breath.

"You don't believe me," she said.

He did not answer. He was feeling too bitter for that. How was Wilmington to aid them locked away below street level as they were, even if he insisted on searching the bazaar? The trap was too well devised. And he had walked into it with his eyes wide open. At least he had imagined them open. Why the girl was with him he did not stop to reason. Perhaps she wanted to "save her face."

His own face was grim in the light of the match he struck. He had only a few of them with him but one was enough to show that they were in a cellar built of hard lava stone, part of the foundations of the building. On one side stood a low table or counter. In one corner matting was piled above some sort of merchandise.

"You had better sit down," he said to the girl. "The mats are cleaner."

"Very well." Her voice was humble, apologetic.

He struck his second match as she took her place. His foot kicked against the pile and he lifted the bottom of the mats and looked at the red-labeled tins beneath them. Then the match went out. He lit a third. It revealed a door in the side wall—the place was perhaps fifteen by thirty—a rectangle of iron without hinge or handle on the inner side, fitting snugly at the back of its recess.

"There's air enough to last for a while," he said. "Some one will be showing up soon. I don't imagine they mean to starve us yet, if I only had my gun!"

There was a rustle where the girl sat, the scrape of the mats and the crisp sound of linen.

"I have a pistol,' she said. "I have always carried one when I travel alone. Here it is. It's only a small one."

His fingers met hers in the dark as he reached for the pistol. Her hand was cold but the touch of it thrilled him. If she had had any part in this why should she give him her own gun. He put the swift repentance he felt into his "thank you." The pistol was a two-shot derringer, almost a toy though effective enough at short range with a good aim."

"Loaded?" he asked.

"Yes, both barrels."

"Then we'll gēt out of this yet. Cheer up."

A light suddenly winked at them from a lone electric bulb in the low ceiling.

"Curtain cue," said Keeler.

He was cool now, dismissing his rage for more effective revenge. His eyes caught those of the girl and he smiled at her. The little pistol gave him fresh confidence in more ways than one. At a grating sound in the direction of the metal door he folded his arms and stood against the wall, the derringer tucked out of sight beneath his left armpit.

The door slid back. There was a brick wall behind it and a gush of warmer air came into the room. Keeler did not move and Claire Arden sat leaning forward, her hands folded on her knees, her eyes fixed on the opening, listening with Keeler to the soft shuffle of felt shoes on the stairs.

Silence held for a second. Then a Chinaman appeared suddenly in the door space, an automatic in each hand. He was dressed in American clothing with the exception of his shoes. In the pale light his skin was the color of an unripe lemon. His hair was close cut above a high slanting forehead, the eyes, deep sunk between high cheekbones and protruding brows, gleamed like cut jet. The mouth was a slit, the thin lips brown. Deep lines ran from nose angles to the corners of the mouth and continued downward in a malicious sneer. He gave a short order and the door closed behind him. He grinned evilly at the girl and nodded at

Digitized by Google

Keeler before he sat down on the long table.

"Stay just as you are," he said in Chinese.

Keeler answered in the same language. The man was well informed. There were to be no idle preliminaries.

"Talk business, Sing-Lee," he said.

There was a quick flash from the jetty eyes.

"You know me? It does not matter. Or it will not. You know then what I want. Give it to me."

"It is not with me."

"I think it is. If it is on board the steamer we shall get it anyway. But I advise you to either give it to me or tell me where it is. To save trouble—and discomfort—and delay."

There was a complacent finality in his tones that assured Keeler Sing-Lee was certain of his program. He did not waste time in asking what would happen to him in any event. He knew. And he had aggravated the situation, if that was possible, by calling the piratical Sing-Lee by name."

"Why did you bring the girl here?" he asked and fancied that Claire Arden's position grew more strained.

"I think you would not care to see her go very long without food—or water. Later—there might be other things. You seem to be very fond of her."

Keeler felt his muscles twitch involuntarily as he measured the distance between himself and the Chinaman, who sat easily as an ape on his table, the thirty-eight automatics menacing both of them. When he got free he meant to get even with Wing-Sang and his brother Wing-Yup. Publicity on his own account must be avoided but he had picked up a card to play—if he got a chance to play it.

Back of his tingling resentment satisfaction leaped. The girl was not in this game She had been used as a stalking-horse. He still stood with folded arms facing Sing-Lee. Somehow he must get him off his guard for a second.

"If I tell you where it is," he said. "You will let her go free?"

"Under certain conditions."

"And myself?"

"We will arrange that later."

Keeler estimated the sinister intent in his voice. And he sensed real danger to the girl. The associates of Sing-Lee were ruthless and there were many white women in Chinese seraglios, hidden in bagnio chambers. How could he avert Sing-Lee's vigilance? He wondered if Claire Arden knew French. Probably. He did not dare ask her. Sing-Lee would check anything after the first sentence. It was worth trying. His own French was weak and he summoned up his vocabulary, knitting his brows and frowning at the Chinaman as if he was trying to make up his mind.

"The steamer sails soon," said Sing-Lee. "You had better make your decision."

"*Vous parlez à lui en Chinois*," he said turning toward the girl. Now he stood sideways to Sing-Lee, the short barrel of the pistol hidden by his sleeve.

Sing-Lee's eyes glittered but before he could speak the girl caught Keeler's meaning. Sing-Lee might know of Claire Arden's familiarity with Mandarin but, he might not, and if she had the brains Keeler credited her with——

"I have got it," she said. "I will give it to you."

For the fraction of a second Sing-Lee turned his face full to the girl in surprise. Keeler pulled the trigger, twice. The derringer spat beneath his armpit. The first bullet caught the Chinaman in the upper right arm and one automatic fell to the dirt. The second hit him fairly in the lower jaw as he swung toward Keeler and he swayed. With one bound Keeler reached him, dragged loose the second gun and hurled Sing-Lee to the floor with bleeding and distorted face, his right arm powerless. Keeler knelt beside him, automatic in hand, facing the door.

"They may have heard the shots and be down on us," he said. "Take my belt and his and strap his hands. Wrap the belts like figure eights and draw them tight."

He kept close watch on the door, praying that they would not turn off the light. Out of the corner of his eyes he saw the girl come bravely toward, then behind him, and felt her arms go about his waist, unbuckle his belt and draw it through the loops. With firm fingers she followed his directions and secured Sing-Lee's feet. Then she took off the Chinaman's own belt.

"Never mind his arm," said Keeler. "Try and imagine what he would have done to you."

Stoical as he was, Sing-Lee winced as his wrists were bound. As she slipped the tongue of the buckle through the hole the light went out. Keeler lifted the Chinaman

Digitized by Google

in the dark and laid him on the long table, sitting beside him, holding him down with one arm.

"Grope on the floor," he said. "You'll find the other automatic. Can you shoot?"

"Yes," she said in a steady voice.

"Good. Watch the door. You'll hear it open if they come down in the dark."

IT SEEMED long minutes before they heard the grate ot fhe iron panel. Somewhere above the lights were still on and the opening was outlined. Then the shuffle of feet and a voice asking for Sing-Lee.

"He is here and bleeding to death," said Keeler. "And the first one who shows in the opening will join him. Go and fetch Wing-Yup."

There was an excited babble of Chinese and the footsteps retreated.

"The elevator is back of you," said Keeler. "Look out for it."

Anxious seconds passed in the oubliette timed to their heart-beats. Keeler began to wonder whether he had not mistaken his trumps. If they really believed Sing-Lee was dying they might abandon all three of them until they were starved to death or helplessness. He made shift to reach his match-case with one hand and looked at his watch. It was five minutes past five.

Quick, decisive footfalls sounded on the stairs and a voice called.

"Is that you, Keeler? This is Wilmington. Don't shoot."

"Come ahead," he answered with relief as he felt the sweat break out upon his forehead. "If you haven't got a light, tell them to switch on this ceiling globe."

The deputy sheriff appeared and, as he stepped into the cellar, the electric light glowed.

"Here's your friend, Sing-Lee," said Keeler. "A trifle damaged but available."

Wilmington walked over to the prisoner after a swift glance of admiration at Claire Arden who had sat down again on the mats, leaning against the wall.

"That saves me some trouble," he said. "You'd better get out of this. I walked in with a couple of my men on a little excitement up-stairs between Wing-Yup and his clerks and I persuaded one of them to tell me what was the matter. Look here, Keeler, I don't suppose you or this lady want to stay over to appear in this but I've got to take some official notice of it. Wing-Yup has got to be handled on some charge for this sort of thing."

"You'll find ample reason under those mats where Miss Arden is sitting, Wilmington," said Keeler. "There must be all of two hundred twelve-tael tins of opium stowed there."

Wilmington called down one of his men to take charge of Sing-Lee while he went with Keeler and the girl up the stairs and through a trap-door, that had been apparently covered with dummy bales, into the basement and so to the store. A plain-clothes man was at the door of the cashier's office guarding Wing-Yup while his clerks stood in silent groups.

"Ring up the wagon, Haines," said Wilmington. "Ambulance case and a haul of dope. You had better get the lady down to the ship, Mr. Keeler, or the reporters will be up here. Hey, you," he wheeled on a clerk. "You catch one pongee dust-coat for this lady. Chop-chop, now."

The man scowled but took a silk automobile coat from a stand.

"What's this for?" Claire Arden asked Wilmington as he handed it to her.

He pointed to her sleeve. From wrist to elbow the white linen was smeared with the blood of Sing-Lee, stained when she had groped for the gun on the floor of the cellar. She shuddered and slipped on the coat gratefully smiling at the police officer. He stepped to the door and peremptorily beckoned a cab from a stand across the street.

Keeler thanked him, handed the girl into the taxi, gave the driver the order to drive to the steamer and got in beside her. At the corner he stopped the vehicle and bought a quantity of carnation leis, most of which he gave to Claire Arden, putting two about his own neck.

"We may as well look as gala as possible," he said. "Now we can pass for sight-seeing *malihinis* (strangers) in case of reportorial curiosity. I've got your pistol in my pocket with the two we took from Sing-Lee. They've got mine to offset that and my belt, confound it. It is still on Sing-Lee's wrists. You were a trump, Miss Arden, all the way through. I couldn't have asked for a better pal in a hole like that. A real friend in need."

She had been leaning rather limply against the cab cushions but she gathered

Digitized by Google

herself together and smiled, flushing with evident pleasure.

"I wish I could be your friend," she said.

CHAPTER IX

NEW YORK

THE *Cathay* sailed just before sunset. Keeler listened to the Royal Hawaiian Band crashing out the melodious strains of "Aloha Oe," popularly attributed to ex-Queen Liliuokalani but in reality a migrated survival of "*The Lone Rock by the Sea*," with decided relief. He had found Redding in his cabin and given him another dose of morphine.

If the doctor evinced any surprise at the safe reappearance of Keeler on board, he showed no signs of it and yet Keeler was sure that he must have known of Wing-Sang as a fellow conspirator, given the special mission of watching the girl, perhaps, and to arrange a second trap with Sing-Lee in case Redding failed.

Without doubt Redding had sent a wireless long ago to Hsu-Fuan telling of Keeler's arrival on board the *Cathay*, the manner of which would tend to confirm the belief that he was the man who had retrieved the talisman. But Hsu-Fuan was a crafty player who carefully thought out a score of possible moves of his opponents before he made one of his own.

Wing-Sang did not make an appearance. It was to be supposed that he had broken his trip to render what assistance he might to his brother Wing-Yup, who, Keeler reflected with much satisfaction, was likely to have some trouble before he arranged the affair of the opium in his cellar. And Sing-Lee was on his way to the convict station on the reef at Iwilei, via the hospital. Things had really cleared considerably. Without doubt the grand coup had been set for Honolulu after Redding's fiasco. Once in America, traveling by train and closely surrounded, the dangers of attack were lessened though far from done away with.

He felt grateful and repentant toward Claire Arden, sorry for having misjudged her, convinced as he still was through his own intuition, and also by the espionage Hsu-Fuan had chosen to bestow upon her, that she was in some way connected with his own affairs. But all that might be his own fault. Any one on friendly terms with him, particularly one who had lived in China would be subject to the suspicion of those determined upon the talisman's recovery.

The final disposition of Redding bothered him. The address on Forty-ninth Street seemed to point to the fact that the doctor's activities were likely to reach as far as New York. A wireless to the Federal authorities who wanted Redding for illicit traffic under cover of the United States mails, would eliminate him.

That would be the sensible thing to do, without question, but Keeler had his own code of ethics. It did not seem entirely sport-like to use something against Redding that belonged back of the period at which they had played their game and he had won. The having won disposed him to magnanimity. He could emphasize his warning to the man not to cross his trail again under penalty of being identified as Dr. Adler. Temporarily he set the question aside.

After dinner he dived into the private cabin that the purser had secured him and reveled in sleep. Early the next morning Redding literally groveled before him for a double dose. The doctor showed plainly the loss of the usual amount of the drug which had falsely invigorated him for so long. His eyes were glassy in deep hollows, his flesh rough and visibly shrunken in body as well as face.

Keeler felt little pity for him but, fearing he might have overdone the tapering-off process, gave him an extra grain. Redding clutched it without thanks and eyes red with resentment and malice. The increased dose made a manifest change. He appeared at breakfast, shaven and for him, well groomed.

Claire Arden did not appear until noon when she ensconced herself in her deck-chair and complained of drowsiness. Her manner rebuffed Keeler a little. At dinner she palpably made conversation and, after she gained the deck again, ostentatiously sought the escort of the ship's physician.

Keeler was puzzled. This was the woman who had said she wanted to be friends. Now she evidently regretted that opening. Why? Woman, he told himself, paraphrasing the utterances of many, is a perpetual puzzle, twisting her feelings into combinations that she herself can not unravel, tricks of feminine instinct perverted by modern environment.

Digitized by Google

He felt better after he had perpetrated this philosophy and went below to look after his impromptu patient. Redding was not gracious.

"My nerves are in a jangle," he said. "Why in the name of Satan can't you let me serve my apprenticeship to that gentleman in my own way?

"Give me my pellets. You have done me out of a thousand dollars, blocked my game and left me between the devils on land and the deep sea. To be safe I've got to travel perpetually between America and the Orient and hide myself whenever we strike the three-mile zone.

"I'm rotten, Keeler, I'll admit. Much of it is my own fault but you can't bring a rotten fruit back to wholesomeness, so why don't you let me lie on my own dung-hill? You don't know the circumstances that broke my manhood and you don't give a whoop what really happens to me. Let me go my own gait, man, and give me back my pellets. God knows they are the only consolation I have left."

"I wouldn't trust you sane, Redding," said Keeler "and I wouldn't place any faith in you drugged with morphine. Your morals are burned out but that drug can stir up a nasty little conflagration in your brain yet and I'll take no chances."

"What are you going to do about it when we get to San Francisco? We are quits, ain't we?"

"I am not sure of that. I haven't made up my mind what I am going to do about it."

"Then get out of this cabin and leave me to conjure with my 'burned-out morals,'" sneered Redding.

As Keeler left he surveyed him with implacable hatred, laughed and let himself swoon as the morphine mastered his senses.

THREE of the five days of the trip passed and Claire Arden, with a woman's finesse limited Keeler to the most casual of conversations. She had plenty of admirers aboard and she surrounded herself with them. It was not shyness, neither was it antipathy and to Keeler it was altogether baffling. He met her with a deferential respect for the position she had chosen to assume but there was a look in his eyes that presaged an inevitable explanation and he could see that she meant to put off that moment.

The fourth day she had her meals taken to her cabin, the last day she entered into the arrangements for the inevitable concert for the Red Cross, singing and entrenching herself behind those who congratulated her and begged for more after the regular program was ended.

Keeler listened for a while to a Claire Arden who was strange to him, who jested and deliberately flirted and made herself conspicuous, an easy matter for her charms and accomplishments. Then he mooned off to the smoking-room and allowed himself to be bored by a man who said he had been at Verdun.

It was expected that they would sight the Farallone Islands at dawn and pass quarantine and dock by noon. Somehow, he resolved, he would corner her. If she meant that she wanted to be his friend, there was an accounting due him and ways and means to be outlined of establishing that future intimacy. He did not deny her thraldom over him. If she had taken this means of letting him play fox to the grapes of her acquaintance, she had succeeded admirably. But he did not think that such methods belonged to the girl he imagined her.

Imagination plays a large part in it, I suppose, he told himself as he broke from the bore and went on deck for a final cigar before visiting Redding and turning in. It is not what a girl *is* but what a man *thinks* she is that rules the game. The memory of the moment when she thrust the pistol into his hand in the cellar rebuked him. He strolled aft and stopped short in the shaddow of the deck-house and funnel. Leaning on the boat-deck rail in what appeared an eminently confidential manner, were Claire Arden and Redding.

As he turned away he heard her laugh followed by the grating cackle of the doctor. She had said that he had the eyes of a weasel, Keeler remembered. All of his suspicions mounted. "Who is your unpleasant acquaintance?" she had asked him, and here she was hobnobbing with the man. More scraps of Walton's sardonic philosophy came to him.

"Your French detective says *Cherchez la femme*," Walton had said. "The motto of the every-day individual should be *Gare la femme*. Did you ever try sticking two strips of metal in a lemon, Keeler? One copper and one zinc, with the neccessary wires attached. Advance the wires and.

Digitized by Google

presto, the spark! Life is the lemon and man and woman the electrodes. The spark is involuntary. The only way to dodge it is—*Gare la femme*, (Eschew the ladies)."

He went to Redding's cabin to leave the nightly dose of three pellets. For a moment he was inclined to leave the entire outfit. But he had not yet decided what disposition to make of the doctor and the man would be more pliable as long as he had to come to him for the drug. Once ashore he could probably secure a new outfit. He looked for a scrap of paper in which to screw the pellets and place them where Redding would be sure to see them and stooped to pick up an envelope thrown into the waste-basket for used towels.

It was an ordinary envelope of yellow manila without legend or mark, save Redding's name and cabin number, but it was the kind used by the wireless operator in delivering messages and Keeler recognized the operator's writing. It was hard to tell whether it had come from Honolulu or San Francisco; the *Cathay's* receiving limit was far greater than the sending. But it was a hundred to one that the message concerned him—or Claire Arden.

Claire Arden kept Keeler awake for a long time that night, deriding himself for the fascination she had held for him, finding excuses for her conduct and then rejecting them, unable to bring back his life to the untrammeled path it had followed before he met her and finding small satisfaction in setting himself down as a fatuous weakling. He was up at two bells, peering through the fog that hid the close-by Farallones. The weather deepened his own gloomy mood and he shook it off. Within a few hours he would be at the Palace getting his instructions for the final dash. He would taxi to the train, he decided, spend the wait in Chicago in the depot of the outgoing train and taxi direct to McVea's address. There would be little danger. If possible he would secure a drawing-room. Perhaps Claire Arden would be on the same train? He mentally anathematized himself for letting her take the spotlight of his thoughts. Delivery once over and the fifty thousand his, he would be through with the whole adventure.

As he walked the misty deck he went over his plans for outfitting for Burmah and the river-bed deposit of priceless jade. Perhaps Walton would be foot-loose in New York. It was quite possible. He knew where to look him up, and they would go together. Walton's views on femininity would hit his to a nicety and Claire Arden would pass out of his life. But it was hard to concentrate on the matter with his old zest.

Three bells struck and he went below to Redding. The doctor's future was no trouble of his. He would give him back his syringe and pellets and let him, as he had asked, go to the devil in his own way. It would be hard to molest him on the trip as he had worked it out but he would be vigilant and, if Redding crossed his trail, let him look out for himself. He would tell him that, he decided, and let the fear of the penitentiary fight it out with the menace of the *T'au-t'ie*.

Redding was not in his cabin. The bedclothes had not been turned back though they showed signs of having been slept upon. His traveling wardrobe had been apparently packed in the suitcase, which was strapped and on the lounge. It was strange. At this hour Redding was usually tossing restlessly, waiting for his allowance of morphine. The excitement of landing might have acted as a temporary spur, thought Keeler. Or Redding might have gone to his cabin.

Ten o'clock came and they had picked up the pilot and were heading through the Golden Gate. Redding had made no appearance and Claire Arden was still below.

As the quarantine tug puffed out to them off Angel Island she came on deck in a traveling suit and walked directly to Keeler.

"Good-by," she said. "I hardly suppose we shall see each other again."

She was pale and her eyes looked as if she too had passed a sleepless night. Keeler held her fingers firmly.

"You said you would like to be my friend," he said. "Has anything occurred to change that view-point? If it has not I want to know where I can find you. I am going to New York."

"So am I. But you misquote me. I said that I wished I could be your friend."

"And?"

"I do not see how that can be possible. I am sorry. Good-by. Don't think me ungrateful."

"I am going to see you again," he said with sudden ardor at which she colored. "I shall not force myself upon you as a traveling companion but this is not going to

Digitized by Google

be the end of our friendship that might have been. I am going to see you again and talk with you. I shall be a free agent soon. I shall find you, if you are in New York. Wherever you are. You are rather a hard person to be eliminated, you know," he concluded in a lighter key, suddenly aware of his own vehemence.

"Perhaps," she said and turned away.

He did not follow her. He wanted to see what had become of Redding.

Keeler was the last to leave the steamer and Redding seemed to have vanished. His suitcase had been turned over to the purser by a steward who reported, with the disgusted look of one who has been done out of a well-earned tip, that he had not seen his passenger since the night before. The purser shrugged his shoulders, indisposed to make a mystery of the affair.

It solved itself as Keeler, having successfully dodged the reporters, salved his baggage from the customs. As he rode in a taxicab to the Palace he saw, swaggering along the Embarcadero, obviously bound for the nearest saloon, three oilers of the off-shift from the *Cathay*. One of them wore the somewhat soiled but flashy check suit that Redding had worn. He had bribed the man to change clothes and sneaked ashore. By this time, thought Keeler, he is looking for a shyster druggist.

There was an explicit telegram at the Palace, in reply to his cable from Shanghai. His route was given in detail to New York, including a stop-over at Albany and the taking of a local train that would bring him to the metropolis toward the shank of the evening. He was to take a cab at the depot and report immediatly. The message ended with a reiteration of caution. Keeler was too evenly balanced to resent the latter and planned to amplify the safety measures.

It looked as if McVea's house was being watched, either on account of the seven petals he already held or to intercept the delivery of the eighth. Confined to drawing-room and dining car, passing from those to a modern taxicab, most of the danger seemed to be well-provided against, if not entirely eliminated, unless an attempt was made at McVea's doorstep.

He took a room, gathered all the New York periodicals and newspapers from the hotel stand, ordered through the office a drawing-room and his transportation and prepared to pass the five hours until train-time in reading. At last he taxied to the ferry and ensconced himself in his Pullman in contented mood.

Claire Arden, he supposed, was traveling eastward on one of the several overland routes, and he flattered himself that he hoped she was not on the same train. Having satisfied himself upon this point by a deliberate pilgrimage or two through the Pullmans, he settled to his magazines, resolved definitely to eliminate her from his affairs.

AT THE end of the delayed trip, by way of Albany, he arrived in New York shortly after ten o'clock, gave his belongings to a redcap, retaining his hand-bag in which he had packed the bulbs and herbs, and followed that worthy to a cab, giving directions to the Biltmore where he had engaged a room by telegraph. There he registered, giving orders for a call at seven o'clock the next morning and a request not to be disturbed before then on any account.

"I am dead tired," he told the clerk. "Never can sleep well on trains."

He followed the information with a prodigious yawn, using it as cover from which to eye a fellow passenger who appeared disgruntled at being told that he could receive no accommodations without having made his reservation. It struck Keeler that the man seemed more interested in the number of the room as displayed on the key-tag handed to the waiting bell-boy, than chagrined over his own lack.

The man's coincidental arrival with his own at the hotel might be chance but he did not delude himself into any belief that the last hour of his quest might not be the most likely to be fraught with accident. The *T'au-t'ie* might have other white men as members besides Redding. The drug habit laughs at caste and country and the fellow passenger showed to his eyes signs of dalliance with narcotics.

He took the elevator to his room, dismissed the boy and locked his door. He ripped the talisman from the peak of his cap and slipped it into the fob pocket of his trousers, secured beneath his tightened belt. Next he inspected his pistol and put it in the side pocket of his coat. Taking the hand-bag he opened his door and inspected the corridor. There was no one in sight and he turned the key in the lock and walked

Digitized by Google

swiftly to the elevators, descending to the bottom floor.

Keeler knew his New York well. He preferred to waste a few minutes in extra precaution rather than follow literally the directions in the telegram. He made his way by the basement passage to the Grand Central Station, turned into the subway, caught a local and got out at the next station, coming to the surface of New York in the Times Building and taking a second cab on Broadway to McVea's address.

It was just eleven o'clock as the taxi stopped on West Ninety-seventh Street. A light showed through the close-drawn curtains on the first floor and another behind the fanlight over the door.

With one hand gripping the pistol and the other holding the hand-bag, Keeler stepped from the vehicle, giving a swift glance up and down the street, half expecting a swift rush. A policeman passed with a casual glance at the cab and a "Good night, sir," to its passenger.

It was the essence of the commonplace, thought Keeler. Bearing a mysterious talisman, accredited holy, or magical, or both; the disappearance of which had, to judge by Bindloss, disrupted Oriental official circles; now, at the last moment of delivery, when attack seemed imminent, behold, a taxi at the curb, a policeman on the sidewalk, the acme of civilized immunity.

"Shall I wait, sir?" asked the driver. Keeler passed him a bill that carried a generous tip.

"Wait until I go in," he said. "They may not be at home. Can you come back in an hour?" There was no use in attracting attention to the fact that some one was calling on McVea, peaceful as the quiet street seemed.

"An hour, sir. I'll be on time."

The cab waited while he mounted the steps and rang the bell. A maid opened the door and Keeler experienced a sense of lively relief. It seemed as if he had left behind all concerted pursuit at Honolulu. The fears of McVea must have been enlivened by impatience. "All right," he called to the chauffeur.

He stepped past the maid into the hall, lit from an electric globe in a lantern of antique bronze, a junction of the centuries, and gave his name.

"Will you step into the reception-room, sir," she said. "Mr. McVea is expecting you."

She opened the door of the room immediately to the right, he wondering a little at the formality. He had expected to be ushered directly to the big library up-stairs. The walls were hung with Oriental brocades and tapestries and the furniture was of carved teak inlaid with pearl, cushionless, cold, uncomfortable. The one table was circular and elaborately chiseled.

Dragons crawled about the central pillar that supported it and the surface was carved in an elaborate fantasy of flowers and leaves, deeply undercut, that left a flat surface no larger than a dinner-plate in which had been set a disk of mother-of-pearl, the petals of the nearest flowers curving on to its shining circle. It was a wonderful piece of craftsmanship and Keeler, placing his hand-bag on a settee that stood behind it against the wall, stood admiring it.

The door opened from the hall and he looked up in some surprise. The man was a stranger, one of McVea's secretaries, possibly. He knew the scientist had two such auxiliaries although he had met only one of them, a very different type.

"Will you take a seat?"

Still with a measure of astonishment Keeler seated himself behind the table by his hand-bag. The man followed his example. Keeler found himself resenting the keen survey from eyes masked by yellow-glassed spectacles in black rims that made it impossible to judge the color of the secretary's eyes. They might have been green, gray, blue or hazel. They were not particularly friendly, he thought. The man had a queer star-shaped birthmark high on his right cheek, he was clean-shaven and his back-combed black hair was sleek as patent leather.

It was hardly the reception he had anticipated after his trip half-way around the world. The maid must have misunderstood.

"Mr. McVea is expecting me," he said. "I do not fancy that he realizes I am here."

The answer astounded him.

"I am Mr. McVea. Mr. Angus McVea. My uncle, Stuart McVea, died last Monday."

CHAPTER X

ANGUS McVEA

FOR the moment Keeler was nonplussed. McVea dead! On Monday! The day they had arrived at San Francisco.

Digitized by Google

The telegram at the Palace was only three weeks old. The papers he had read at San Francisco had been of course several days late and he had confined himself to magazines on the train. It was a shock. He could hardly feel grief for the scientist. His own affairs were uppermost. Who was Angus McVea?

He did not know of the existence of a son though there might well have been one. His dealings with the dead man had been personal and private. Suppose Angus McVea discredited the talisman? Then, remembering the visit to McVea's lawyers, he regained confidence. Unless McVea had died a bankrupt, which was highly improbable, his estate was still liable for the fifty thousand dollars. And he considered he had earned every penny of it.

"It must have been sudden," he said. "I received a telegram from him in San Francisco."

The other nodded.

"That was sent you on the fourth, I believe. It was sudden. Hardening of the arteries, aggravated by excitement. My uncle was far from himself toward the end, however. He suffered from—hallucinations."

Keeler stiffened. He recollected McVea's anxiety concerning sclerosis, but the word "hallucinations" seemed the prelude to an argument, the salute before the encounter. His Scotch instincts took command.

"Indeed," he said. "This is very unfortunate. You are the nephew of Stuart McVea?"

"And his sole legatee."

"Hardly that, I think. If the will has been opened you should have found at least one bequest."

"To you, for fifty thousand dollars. Exactly. We will talk of that presently." He took a wallet from his coat and laid it on the table, opening it and taking out a sheaf of yellow-backed certificates. Keeler noted they were of high denomination and felt better until he figured that even if they were all like the top one, marked one thousand dollars, there were not enough to represent the amount he intended to collect.

He watched Angus McVea closely as he handled the money and decided that he was a cold-blooded individual. Yet there seemed a suppressed air of nervousness about him, or perhaps it was merely the natural atmosphere of the situation, the reflex from his own sensations.

Angus McVea started to talk in a level voice.

"Now, Mr. Keeler, I have gone pretty thoroughly into my uncle's affairs. I was with him for several weeks before he died. I know of your mission. To me it appears a hare-brained expedition, the search for a philosopher's stone instituted by a visionary. Stuart McVea collected a museum which, valuable as it may be, as much of it appears to be, to those peculiarly interested in such things; is to me merely the representation of so much waste of time and money.

"This petal of gold that you bring—I take it you have been successful from your telegrams and cables—has a value purely mythical. My uncle attached to it an importance that would appear to have vanished with his personal interest in it. It has some intrinsic value which can be determined upon by experts.

"They have indeed already appraised it from the seven petals which he has in his museum. But to him it had attributes that were born of a mind brooding over the poppy-cock of Orientalism; he attached to it virtues, unproven, absurd in the light of modern science. Exactly what they were no one, perhaps, knows, save from his cryptic ramblings—something on a par, as I have already said, with the philosopher's stone, belonging to the Dark Ages. I have told you that he had hallucinations."

"The value he attached to this talisman," said Keeler in a hard, dry tone, "and the purposes to which he intended putting it, have nothing to do with me or my agreement with him, attested at his attorneys.' I have risked my life momentarily for over seven months, Mr. McVea, and I have carried out my end of the contract. I expect my money."

"I am desirous to do the right thing. I want, as far as is reasonable, to conform with his wishes. I have come prepared to do so."

"I doubt whether you are sufficiently prepared," said Keeler dryly, looking at the too thin package of certificates.

Evidently the man wanted to bargain and he had no intention of abating his price. Angus McVea took up the money.

"That we shall see," he said. "Before we go any farther perhaps you will let me see the petal. I have handled the others and will recognize it. There will be no necessity for an expert's opinion."

Digitized by Google

Keeler felt his Irish choler getting the better of his Scotch prudence. Did this undersized whippersnapper think that he would attempt to produce a counterfeit? He thought of the dissection of the dead man's gullet in the cave and itched to slap the smooth cheeks of the scientist's heir, a typical New York business man whose heart would have stopped beating from sheer terror at the test of the least of the perils that he, King Keeler, had passed through.

He took the talisman from his fob and laid it in the center of the pearl inlay.

"I fancy there will be no question as to its genuineness," he said. "If you are afraid of a substitute we can put the matter up to the Metropolitan Museum authorities. But you will be responsible in the sum of fifty thousand for its safe-keeping. I have packed that bit of dynamite about with me long enough.

"You misunderstand me, Mr. Keeler." The other spoke with sudden suavity in deprecation of the crisp determination of Keeler's speech and look. "I do not doubt you. You see I brought the money with me ready to talk business."

He bent over the scrap of tarnished gold and Keeler saw that his nostrils were dilated by nervousness, or eagerness. His fingers trembled as they pressed on the carvings. That was it, the man wanted the thing as badly as his uncle had done. His talk of visionaries was a bluff.

"It is yours for fifty thousand dollars," said Keeler. "That and a receipt."

"A receipt?"

"You are not Stuart McVea. I do not even know that you are Angus McVea or his heir."

The other shrugged his shoulders and smiled with his lips parting over unclosed teeth. His nervousness had disappeared and he reseated himself, leaving the talisman untouched between them.

"I should hardly be receiving you in this house, at this hour, if I were not," he said. "You talk foolishly, Mr. Keeler. I can appreciate that you are anxious to close your commission. So am I. The receipt seems unnecessary but it amounts to nothing. We can defer this until tomorrow, at McKechnie & Menzies, if you desire. But I shall not assume responsibility for the petal.

"I realize that you have passed through much risk for which you should be well paid. You have already received five thousand dollars besides the expenses of your caravan and trip. You mention the Museum. I expect them to take over my uncle's collection. He has willed part of it to them. The rest they will purchase. They value the flower of eight petals complete at ten thousand dollars.

"Granting that this completes the curio, no petal can be estimated at more than a thousand dollars. This has already cost ten thousand. It would be ridiculous for me to pay out such a sum as fifty thousand for it. I offer you, first and last, the ten thousand dollars I have in my hand, more as a tribute to the desire of my uncle——"

"Whose heir you are——"

"Whose heir I am, than from any idea of its purely fictitious worth as he estimated it. Ten thousand dollars besides what you have already received is an extravagant sum for seven months' work, Mr. Keeler. Any court would so estimate it."

"We will see what McKechnie & Menzies think about it."

"I have already talked with them about it. They concur with me. It would be comparatively easy for me to have my uncle's will set aside, Mr. Keeler. His actions for some months before his death, were, as competent witnesses will declare, decidedly erratic. His mind was not balanced. The ridiculous price he was willing to pay for this bit of gold is evidence in itself. You will find it an expensive and lengthy matter to fight us. Better take the ten thousand, Mr. Keeler."

He held out the bills.

The Sandy and Paddy of Keeler's psychology wrestled violently. And Sandy, backed by Massachusetts training, temporarily won. He could easily imagine that many actions and speeches of the late Stuart McVea might be construed as those of mental debility and, like many laymen, he exaggerated the ease with which testaments may be set aside.

Indubitably, without much money of his own, he would have a hard time forcing an issue against wealthy opponents. There would be congested calendars, specious delays. He could see himself tied up in New York for an indefinite period while appeal dragged into appeal and the costs ate up the amount at stake.

Then Paddy got a half-Nelson on the prudent Sandy, shifted it to a hammerlock and pinned him to the mat, stunned. Keeler

Digitized by Google

had been slowly disliking Angus McVea in an increasing ratio ever since he had come into the room. Instinctively he mistrusted him and returned with interest the other's suggestion about the verity of the talisman. Take ten thousand instead of fifty? Not if he threw the golden petal into the Hudson. He was all Irishman in his flaming indignation.

"I will see you in Hades first," he said, "and escort you half-way to be sure you have a good start. I entered into that deal in good faith and no piker who has been jerked into the handling of a dead man's money is going to dictate to me. Break the will if you want to but I'll handle some of the fragments and indulge in a little exercise of my own. Why, you picayune four-flusher——"

The other retreated to the wall, his face pale, his nostrils dilating nervously.

"Wait one moment, just one moment, Mr. Keeler," he said. "I must consult some one else. Just one second."

He pleaded with almost ludicrous earnestness, setting his finger on an ivory button in the wall. A bell tinkled. Keeler, reaching for the talisman, paused. A door opening from another room, swung forward and a woman entered. She was dressed in clinging folds of black silk that accented wonderfully the satin-white of arms and neck and face, creamy pale save for scarlet lips, crowned with a mass of flaming hair that made Keeler start backward half a step.

IT WAS Claire Arden!

Keeler stared at her in amazement and she returned his glance with what he interpreted as complacency. The feeling of dim recognition that he had experienced when he first met her in Bob Sinclair's bungalow at Shanghai, came back to him and he placed it. He looked from her swiftly to Angus McVea. That was it. A subtle modeling of mouth and chin, softened in the girl, but unmistakable. They were related. But where in the devil had he seen Angus McVea before. That he could not determine.

But it was not as Angus McVea. The thing was a plant. The girl was a traitress. She must have all along been in league with Hsu-Fuan, with Redding, with Wing-Sang. He had been purposely misled by instructions that gave her time to reach New York ahead of him. And now, in McVea's own house. . . .

He checked the furious current of conjecture. One hand dropped to his side pocket for his automatic as he reached for the talisman on the table.

It was gone. In the few seconds that his attention had been diverted by the unexpected appearance of the girl it had vanished. The pseudo Angus McVea had not moved. He was ten feet away, the girl an even greater distance. The table was in front of him but the disk of the pearl inlay where the petal had lain an instant before was clear. He pressed on it. It was firm beneath his touch. His pistol flashed out, covering the man. The girl shrank backward, there was a slight click and the room was plunged into darkness.

Keeler tried to thrust the table behind which he stood to one side. It resisted as if it were anchored to the floor. He heard the rustle of skirts, the sudden slam of a door as he pulled trigger.

The flame split the room as the gun barked and, dodging about the immovable table, he sprang forward, knowing that he was alone. He found the knob of one door and tugged at it uselessly. Then the next. Both exits were locked against him. It must have been the girl who threw off the lighting switch. He lit a match and found it behind where she had stood. But no ray responded. A master switch had been thrown outside.

The match burned down to his fingertips. For a moment he stood undecided. He was effectively trapped and with the talisman, the bait, the ten thousand dollars he had refused, had vanished. He had not even the satisfaction of the ginned brute that can at least secure the lure. The petal, he was convinced, had vanished through some mechanism of the carven table that was fastened so stoutly to the floor.

He leaped to the window and raised the blind. It opened to a tiny balcony close to the top step of the stoop. He loosened the catch and stepped out.

The shot had passed unnoticed. In these days of backfires and tire explosions its sound was not unusual. It was close to midnight and the street showed no signs of life.

The light was out above the front door. The window-blinds were all drawn. He was convinced that the place was empty. With

Digitized by Google

such a precious piece of spoil the confederates had long since made their getaway, through the basement and up the area steps or possibly through the garden at the back while he was wasting matches and tugging at the bolted doors. He ran down the front steps and a shorter flight into the area. The lower door was guarded by an iron gate. It was ajar but back of it the entrance was fastened. He was checkmated.

As he returned to the sidewalk he heard the sound of a motor. His taxicab was returning. It swerved to the curb and halted.

"Ready, sir?" asked the driver.

"Not quite. Look here, have you got an electric torch with you? The gas is leaking inside and we can't raise a plumber. I want to investigate. Thanks, and a wrench and screw-driver, if you have them handy."

The man opened his tool-box. As long as his meter ran he was not carping at reasonable requests.

"Need any help?" he asked.

"Don't think so. But I wish you would scoot somewhere and get me half a dozen good cigars. Good ones, no drug-store brands." He blocked the chauffeur's hesitation at leaving his fare by handing him a twenty-dollar bill and watched him drive off before he stepped quickly back to the balcony and through the window. Setting the torch on the table where its ray shone on the door into the hall he went swiftly to work. In the panel, heart-high to the man who had called himself the heir of McVea, his bullet had torn through.

The lock gave way under his efforts and he looked into the hall. The house was silent. Before he commenced his exploration he examined the table more closely. Back of the entwining dragons the pedestal column fitted snug to the floor and he saw a trace of splintered hardwood radiating from the leg that confirmed his belief that a masked chute had been contrived down which the talisman had disappeared. He walked over to where Angus McVea had stood, and knelt.

The floor was of parquetry with a border of darker woods in geometric design. One of the cubes gave under his touch. He stood up and pressed on it with his foot, the torch-ray focused on the table. As the section of wood subsided the inlay of pearl tilted silently and, on the release of pressure, came back to level, firm to the test of his fingers, apparently locked by a spring-catch.

He went back to the hall and turned toward the back stairs. Close to them he found the wall-case that enclosed the electric switches and fuses and found the combinations for the lower floors. A swift excursion to the second floor showed him bare unfurnished rooms. The room from which Claire Arden had emerged to distract his attention while the trick was worked was also empty. So were the basement rooms and offices.

Water dripped from one of the kitchen taps. Departure had been recent. Either Stuart McVea was actually dead, which he doubted, or for some reason he had moved. But the stage of the hall and the front room had been cleverly set for his undoing. And there had been juggling with telegrams. Some one close to the scientist was in the plot.

In the room beneath the table a metal tube pierced the ceiling, coming down to within a foot of the floor above a pad of old carpet. On this the talisman had fallen. The maid, also a conspirator, might have been there to receive it. The details did not matter. The ruse had been successful.

Back in the hall he noticed a telephone that had not yet been removed. Close beside it a directory hung to a hook. The issue was dated six months previously. He looked up the firm of McKechnie & Menzies, noting their initials. But no residential address was given either in the Manhattan, Brooklyn or Richmond sections. Probably they lived in hotels or apartment houses or some suburban district not in the directory. There was only one book. He would have to defer seeing the lawyers until their offices opened.

The chauffeur had not yet returned and he went on to the upper floors of the house intent upon a thorough investigation. A little dust had settled and, on the hand-rail between the second and third landings, he saw the print of fingers that had recently touched the banister. With ready gun he mounted and went through the empty rooms. A door in the top hall showed a ladder to the roof. At the head of the rude stairs he found the scuttle unfastened. That was their exit! He pushed through the leads.

The house roofs were level, with low copings separating them. Chimneys and

Digitized by Google

clothes-line supports were the only visible objects. He stood at fault. He could not go knocking at closed scuttles at this or any other time of the night without running the risk of arrest. Somewhere, to left, or right, they had disappeared into one of thirty available houses along a line of retreat that had been prepared. Somewhere they were laughing at the ease with which they had fooled him at the last moment.

What made the talisman a treasure so highly valued? The ten thousand dollars had been genuine enough. He doubted whether its offer had been more than a blind but why should these Caucasians be so anxious to obtain it—unless to hand it over to Chinese or Tibetan agents? The girl had been one of Hsu-Fuan's spies, even as Redding, alias Adler. And he had believed in her against his secret judgment.

FROM the roof he could hear his taxicab returning and he descended, fastening the scuttle behind him. The thought of Redding had brought up the address in the note-book. Sleep was impossible and he decided to see what sort of a place it was. It was foolish to think of watching the street for Claire Arden and her accomplice to come out. They would not do so that night and they were too clever not to have arranged ways of getting inconspicuously clear, unless they were to turn over the talisman immediately. It was hard to arrive at a decision.

He retrieved his hand-bag with the bulbs and herbs, all, save the pictures he had snapped in the glen, that he had to show for his journey.

Save for the whirring motor the street had apparently gone to sleep. He gave back the tools to the chauffeur and made up his mind. To watch the row of houses would be a waste of time.

While he had been searching the rooms, they would have had plenty of time to cover their tracks, make a transfer, get clear or lie *perdu*, it might be for days, while they transmitted the talisman by some one who had been waiting for it, who could walk boldly out of the house where they were hidden, in broad daylight.

He looked at the note-book he had taken from Redding and gave the chauffeur the address on West Forty-ninth Street. The blasé driver evinced no surprise at his passenger's vagaries but threw in the clutch.

Three blocks away a big car passed them, going fast in the opposite direction. Behind it trailed another, a light roadster. Keeler twisted in his seat to watch them. The first car carried only its driver but in the back seat of the roadster he recognized Redding.

It was a second or two before he could get the attention of his own chauffeur and tell him to follow the two cars. By the time the clumsy taxicab had made its turn with shuffling change of overworked gears the cars were entering the block of McVea's residence, a square apart.

The leading car swerved to the curb, two figures ran down some steps, jumped on the running-board and flung themselves into the tonneau as the driver touched his accelerator and the machine leaped into its full speed once more. The following car slackened speed also and now picked it up again. Both raced to the park, the blundering taxi falling rapidly behind. At the turn Keeler saw the chase was hopeless.

"No good trying to get them," said his driver. "The car in the lead is a Riret, they can lose that roadster whenever they want to if they don't get pinched for speeding and that ain't likely this time of night. Hard luck, boss. Where to now? Forty-nint'?"

"You didn't get their numbers, did you?"

"Nope, I was runnin' the car."

Keeler lit a cigar as some solace to the turn in his luck. He had made an effort to read the figures on the license-tag of the rear car but the pace had been too swift and the lights too dim. It had been equally impossible to place the house from which the girl and the man who had called himself Angus McVea had run down to the car.

There had been a touch of genius in the planning of the affair at the end of the trail, bringing it off at the last second. Was Redding trailing the others or was he in league with them? At all events Redding must have kept in close touch to Claire Arden from the moment she left the *Cathay*.

It was certain too that the telegram giving him his roundabout route from San Francisco to New York had been inspired to give the girl—and perhaps Redding—time to reach the city well ahead of him and set the stage for the little farce in which he had played the rôle of boob. Yet was it all a farce? If Stuart McVea were actually dead,

Digitized by Google

was his decease from natural causes or from murder?

The only definite clew left him was the Forty-ninth Street address. In San Francisco he had wasted perhaps eight hours, with the delay at the steamer on Redding's account and the wait for the train selected for him. His route had set him back about twelve hours more. The others had been in New York for the best part of a day ahead of him. Had Redding's morphine-rotted brain remembered the Forty-ninth Street address and, if so, had he called there. Was it a sufficiently important rendezvous for him to return? Keeler thought it was from what he remembered of the district.

CHAPTER XI

THE LHAKKANG

A DARK, unsavory alley split the block of dingy houses, running lengthwise between the board fences of what had been gardens in the days of the neighborhood's respectability, now mere rubbish-heaps of empty boxes, broken bottles and general refuse. Keeler, tiptoeing along, counted off eleven houses, halting at the rear of the address in Redding's little book. He had already reconnoitered the front.

The polyglot character of the residents of the place was evinced in the signs scribed in a dozen languages. It was a section of the quasi-Oriental district where Armenians, Hindoos, half-castes of the East Indies, a tarbrush-smeared horde, mostly mongrel, swarmed. Several fortune-tellers occupied the ground floors of the ashamed-looking brown-stone fronts, scarred and pitted and very much down in the world. Most of these seers pretended to be yogis of merit and Keeler began to feel certain he was on a warm trail.

The basements were mostly restaurants, some of which were still open. At one o'clock in the morning Keeler knew that the drawn blinds masked an activity that was as far removed from Americanism as the Taj Mahal is from the Waldorf-Astoria, an activity that was made up of greed and racial prejudice and in which law and order and morality were unknown.

He had dismissed his cab three blocks away. He had walked on the opposite side of the street from the number he was bent upon exploiting, reeled rather than walked, affecting the gait and manner of a man who, too full of liquor, was uncertain of his way, glancing at his surroundings with frowning indecision. His apparently vacuous eyes had taken in the meaning of certain gilded characters on the doorway of the house in question, characters that told him of the establishment of a Buddhist temple.

To attempt a direct entrance was folly, to linger in the hope of connecting with Redding was equally to invite disaster and he had lurched around two blocks, making sure he was not followed, before he attempted the alley.

He slid over the four-foor fence like a shadow and swiftly traversed the strip of garden-yard to stand at the foot of the house wall, looking upward at the slits of light that showed through drawn shutters three floors above him. Very carefully he piled two boxes for a platform from which he reached the last stage of a rusty fire-escape and swung himself to the landing, mounting the iron stairs as lightly as a cat. He had left the handbag in a corner drug-store to be picked up later. The windows of the third floor were guarded by sheet-iron blinds. He squatted on the fire-escape, listening.

He could hear the sound of chanting timed by the clap of the 'wooden fish' in the hands of the choir-leaders. A bell sounded now and then. A drum boomed.

Still crouching, he tested the shutters. One of them was warped by the weather, bulging at the center and he tried with his knife-blade to reach the bar that closed it from the inside. He could barely touch the slot in which it rested.

A thought struck him and he went on to the next floor. Here the shutters were swung back to the bricks and the windows blinded by some sort of hangings. He set to work picking the already disintegrating putty from one of the panes of glass. It came away rapidly. The metal points that still held the glass in place had rusted and he was able to ease his blade between glass and frame and remove it gently to the fire-escape.

Then he reached inward and upward, careful not to disturb the curtains and unfastened the catch, easing up the lower sash inch by inch. The hangings were of brocaded fabric. He made a tiny slit, drew it apart with his fingers and peered through. Satisfied at the correctness of his guess he

Digitized by Google

stepped cautiously across the sill and stood behind the heavy curtains.

The two floors had been made one by the removal of the ceiling between them and Keeler stood on a narrow gallery, its wall hung with the tapestries behind which he stood motionless. Bells sounded, horns blended with the beat of drums and the air was hot and heavy with incense. The chant recommenced. He knelt and then lay at full length, wriggling from beneath the hangings. They barely moved. In the uncertain lighting of the temple, fogged with smoke from the censers, the shifting of their folds must have passed unnoticed.

Immediately in front of him, looking down upon the main hall of the temple, were three statues of painted and gilded wood, ten feet high, the Ministers of Buddha. One glared with black eyes in a fiendish countenance, holding a great sword above a hideous, dwarfish figure at its feet. Next was the "Merry God," playing on a stringed instrument. Beyond stood an image with an unfolded umbrella and the fourth held in one hand a struggling serpent, in the other a sphere. Backing them was an elaborately carven and gilded frame, in front a balustrade.

Keeler stood behind the broad figure of the Merry God. Across the hall, beneath a pavilion, sat the Three Precious Ones: Buddha, the Intelligence, Dharma, the Law, and Sangha, the Priesthood. Before them was an altar where incense sticks burned and narcissus grew in shallow dishes. In front of this five bronze vases stood on a large table, two filled with flowers, two with candles and the central one with the symbols of the god.

There were nearly fifty worshipers prostrate on mats, dressed for the most part in American clothing, made the more incongruous by the gray and yellow robes of the priests. Some special service of petition or thanksgiving was in progress.

As he gazed, an elderly priest raised up a looking-glass, a second a jug and a third a cup. Another stood ready with a silken napkin while the rest chanted a prayer or beat upon the clappers, the gongs and the big drum by the entrance.

He had arrived at the culmination of the services. The glass was lifted to catch the image of the passing spirit, the contents of the jug were poured several times across its surface and wiped off with the napkin after the liquid had flowed into the cup, made holy by passing over the captured spirit-reflection. The priests received each a few drops on their hands, touching their shaven crowns, foreheads and breasts before they reverently swallowed the remainder.

The chant ceased, the worshipers rose. Buddha had entered into his chosen ones. The priests disappeared behind the images. The devotees began to go out slowly. Some remained to rub together the palms of their hands and tell their beads before the Precious Ones, but soon the hall was empty.

The monks who had held the mirror, the jug, the cup and the napkin, emerged from behind the triad of Buddhas and crossed the hall toward the balcony. There were narrow stairs leading from one end of the gallery to what Keeler decided was the private sanctum of the head priests, screened off beneath him. He crept back behind the hangings until he heard the faint murmur of their voices below, then stole to the end of the gallery and half-way down the stairs. They led to a little anteroom, curtained off from the temple proper and from the priests' room.

He was in a precarious position if some one else should come up noiselessly on sandaled or naked feet and suddenly draw the curtain. He returned to the balcony and lay flat, his head close to the floor above the top of the curtain that masked the sanctum. The voices were muffled, but presently the tympani of his ears became attuned to conditions and he began to distinguish words.

The talk was casual at first and dwelt on the profits of the special service just given. Then two syllables caused Keeler to hold his breath and project his head turtle-wise from the gallery into the space of the anteroom. The floor acted as sounding-board and he was able to follow the whole conversation in Mandarin.

"Hsu-Fuan?" The voice seemed to belong to that of the oldest of the priests, the one who had upheld the mirror, it wavered between shrillness and a by-gone bass but it was the voice of authority.

"What if Hsu-Fuan has failed," it went on. "The greater merit shall be ours if we succeed. The petals of Lao-Tze shall be reunited. Shall the flower of holy magic reveal its secrets to the white devils while Buddha lives?"

"What can be done then?" asked another. "This white wizard Mak-way (McVea) is

Digitized by Google

watched. Sing-Lee has failed, with Wing-Sang and Wing-Yup. The white member of the Order has failed. The messenger of Mak-way still lives and holds the petal."

"T-s-s-sh! Is it not written by the holy Lao-Tze himself in the Book of the Way: 'Do nothing and all things shall be done.' He who knows how to bind, uses no ropes, yet you can not untie. He who knows how to shut, uses no bolts, yet you can not open. What has been willed must come to pass and the wisdom of the prophet shall prove the folly of the infidel. The way of life shall be their path to death. Do we not know that now the woman and not the man bears the petal? Is not the woman followed? May not the white brother report to us at any moment. Then we shall strike and recover."

How did they know that Claire Arden had gained possession of the talisman? The "white brother" was undoubtedly Redding, who was following her. Suddenly the whole thing became clear as Keeler remembered what Claire Arden had said to Sing-Lee in the cellar at Honolulu. "I have got it, I will give it to you." Sing-Lee had believed that, in the face of deadly peril, she had told the truth. Unless, indeed, Redding was cognizant of what had happened at McVea's and had played the rôle of double traitor to the girl and Hsu-Fuan. This last did not seem credible.

Claire Arden, despite appearances, could hardly have made a confidant of a man like Redding. One thing remained clear, that McVea was alive and being watched. If the scientist knew this it would account for his having moved. Undoubtedly he had notified Keeler of his change of address and the miscarriage of that message only added to the mystery. Was it possible that Claire Arden was in league with McVea to secure the petal for less than the stipulated sum?

The dimly lit anteroom suddenly lightened as the curtain dividing it from the temple was lifted. Keeler drew back his head like a startled lizard. A priest held back the drapery, his crafty face cocked toward the inner room. He beckoned and Redding appeared in the opening. The priest left him in the anteroom while he announced him to his superiors.

Keeler, peering carefully down, saw that Redding appeared depressed and nervous. He moved a shaky hand to his hip, produced an automatic pistol and examined breech and safety, changed it to a side pocket and gave a low sigh before he shook a pellet free from a tiny vial into the palm of his hand and swallowed it, tossing the empty container to the floor where it struck with a tiny tinkle.

The minor priest reappeared, ushered Redding through curtain and door and, when these were in place, kneeled to catch what was being said inside. Above, Keeler strained his hearing to the utmost. If he could get the clue as to the whereabouts of Claire Arden it would go hard if he could not reach her ahead of the priests. To his own astonishment he found himself more concerned about her safety than the recovery of the talisman and his own fifty thousand dollars.

CHAPTER XII

IN THE TEMPLE GALLERY

KEELER had correctly diagnosed Redding's condition. He was nervous. Ever since he had managed to get free from the *Cathay* without being recognized by any long-memoried detective he had felt a good deal like a fly who has got one foot in the Tanglefoot mixture and fears to set down the rest. He wanted to get through with his mission and secure the thousand dollars that he had missed collecting from Sing-Lee.

He was not safe in America. Any moment might bring the dreaded tap on the shoulder. Keeler might have warned the authorities. He surely would if their paths crossed. For that reason he had felt a great relief when a message from Wing-Sang had reached him on the *Cathay* to watch Claire Arden.

He was being given another chance to make good by Hsu-Fuan. He freely cursed the day when his own indulgences had mixed him up with the *T'au-ti'e* of which order Hsu-Fuan was apparently the head. He had failed once and failure was not smiled upon by those who had to assume the ultimate responsibilites and penalties. Now he was not at all sure that he had not failed again. If he had not, he could collect the thousand dollars and get away to South America or some place where his skill at cards would render him a good living, providing he had the initial stake.

What with the fear of the penitentiary

Digitized by Google

and the necessity for keeping a close watch on Claire Arden, he had been obliged to deny himself in the matter of morphine. He had slept little, ate little and lived in a state of constant physical and mental irritability.

It had not been hard at first to trail the girl, knowing her destination. Of the several routes east from San Francisco, she would naturally take the fastest. This happened also to be the first train to leave after the arrival of the *Cathay*. No two of the fliers left simultaneously. He had merely to patrol the ferry station at certain intervals and watch the gates of the various overland lines.

He had a leeway of two hours before the first left, enough for him to report to the local head of the *T'au-t'ie* in Chinatown, change his oiler's slops and secure an outfit of morphine pellets and syringe. He was at the Southern Pacific main-line entrance at the ferry thirty minutes ahead of time, making himself as inconspicuous as possible in the fear of recognition, harassed by the thought that Keeler might take the same train as the girl and, seeing him, instantly put the machinery of the law in action.

Fifteen minutes before the boat left Claire Arden passed through the gates. Redding followed as soon as he could secure his reservation and kept out of her sight. Keeler might have warned her against him though he had taken pains to find out where he stood by scraping acquaintance with her on the steamer under cover of praising Keeler.

The change of attitude between Keeler and the girl he had set down as corroboration that Claire Arden now carried the talisman. He knew that he was not entirely in Hsu-Fuan's confidence, a little better than a pawn upon the board of that astute Chinese player, and he did not care, beyond the securing of the thousand dollars promised him in New York.

On the train he saw the girl occasionally, traveling with her across town at Chicago, meeting her in the diner, but he did not press his society upon her. They were in different pullmans. She had a drawing room and he an upper-berth in which, from dark to breakfast, he reveled in forgetfulness, denying himself the drug by day save as he needed it to bolster him.

Redding was far from being a fool. His brain cells had deteriorated under the morphine which had also rotted his never too strong moral fibers. As the journey lengthened without trouble he relaxed the fear of arrest. He would keep out of Keeler's way, follow the girl to some permanent abode, report to the *T'au-t'ie* in New York, collect and disappear.

Keeler had taken his note-book but he remembered the street and it would be an easy matter to find the place. What the talisman was or what it represented he did not bother himself with. The whereabouts of Claire Arden signified his release. With the money in his pocket he would get aboard a steamer, go back to his twenty grains a day and forget the Federal authorities and Hsu-Fuan.

So he reasoned over and over again while the journey lasted. At New York he trailed the girl like a hound that sees the end of the chase in sight, his mind a-slaver for his reward. A man met her and bore her off with hardly a word of greeting, to an automobile that waited at the curb with engine in action. Before Redding could get a taxicab he saw the hopelessness of following such a car but, as it slipped away into the ruck, he managed to secure its number.

Now, as he entered the priests' room, he felt the wear and tear of the day's chase that had ended in another losing of the trail. He still had hopes of picking it up but he might have failed after all. A second acknowledgment of lack of success would not be cheerfully received. He was glad of the brace of the pellet he had swallowed outside the door.

Prone on the gallery floor Keeler listened for the lightest word. Below him, the minor priest followed his example.

There was a sharp interchange of syllables too rapid for Keeler to distinguish. He set them down as pass-words of the order. Then the head-priest spoke in a voice sharp with authority, using excellent English. Keeler heard a swift intake of breath from the listener beneath him, a hiss of disgust and disappointment, though the man did not move.

"You have followed the woman?"

"Yes." Redding's voice smacked of resentment at the tone of the inquiry.

"Where is she now?"

"That I cannot tell you until later today."

"What foolishness is this? You have

Digitized by Google

failed once. You should be more careful. If you have lost sight of her——"

"I have not lost her. All day I have trailed her. At the depot a car was waiting for her. I had trouble getting a cab but I read the number on the machine. Finally I traced it. It was a rented car. I found the garage and, in a neighboring one, I myself hired a machine and driver and held them in readiness near by. I waited at the first garage until the woman's car returned, and spoke to the driver. The garage people told me he was the best driver they had and the car the fastest car.

"I told him I wanted to hire him with the machine for a long trip after he had fulfilled his present contract. He was reticent at first. He would not give out the name of the people who had hired him nor give any account of his work and I did not press him. But I bought him drinks and cigars and took him out to dinner under the pretext of talking of the trip we were to make.

"First he filled his tanks and replaced a tire and left the name of the restaurant to which we went. He was expecting a call, he said. His party was anticipating a long night-trip to some place in Western Massachusetts. By the time dinner was over and I had given him twenty dollars to retain his services, we were friendly. After dinner I went back to the garage with him on the pretext of talking car purchase. We talked until nearly midnight.

Then his orders came. I bade him good night, ran to my car and trailed his as it left the garage. It was faster than mine but we both traveled under the limit and we easily kept it in sight until we were passing through West Ninety-seventh Street. I was two blocks behind. The car turned to the curb, slackening a little. The woman and a man ran down the steps of a house and jumped to the running-board and into the tonneau through the door that the driver had opened. We followed. They turned north by the Park and put on speed."

"What number was it on Ninety-seventh?"

"I could not see. The house was dark. But it was the fourth or fifth house from the east end of the block on the north side. I think the fourth. There were awnings and window boxes."

"You are sure it was not in the center of the block?"

Keeler chuckled silently. He knew what the priests thought. That it must have been McVea's house. Now he knew down which scuttle the girl and her accomplice had disappeared. He would look up the house with the awnings and the flowers. But the priests, probably knowing McVea's house untenanted, must be beautifully puzzled. His hunch to come to Forty-ninth Street was turning out very satisfactorily.

"It matters little," said the priest peremptorily. "Go on."

"There is little more to say. At full speed we could not hold them and lost sight of the car, traveling north. But the chauffeur expects to be back early this afternoon. I have an appointment with him for three o'clock. It will be very easy. I did all that could be done. And I have not lost her."

"You have lost valuable time. But the secret of the petals takes long to evolve. And Lao-Tze will guard his own. May your confidence be rewarded."

"I hope so. With a thousand dollars."

"When the petal is restored."

"Nothing doing, my friends." The morphine pellet was at the apex of stimulation and its false courage inspired Redding to the ease of slang. "I want that thousand dollars tomorrow. I alone have the confidence of the driver. I alone know the number of the car and the name and address of the garage. At three-thirty tomorrow, or rather this afternoon, when the room-clerk of the McAlpin shall have opened an envelope given him by you and holding one thousand dollars in currency, he will connect you with me on the telephone and I will give you the information. After that our mutual business is ended."

"You are staying at the McAlpin?" The priest's voice purred.

"I am. And I have taken all precautions to look out that you do not double-cross me. I am not meeting the driver at the garage. It is of no use your scowling at me, my friend. This is not China."

"You fool." Keeler caught the quietly assured ring to the priest's voice. "Do you think you can escape the *T'au-t'ie* and its connections? Before our power you are as a maggot in the sun. Hide how and where you will, until you have fulfilled the orders to which you are bound by oath, you will not only fail to touch the price of your hiring but you will walk one step ahead of certain death.

Digitized by Google

"You fool! Do you think we do not know all about you? That there is a price upon your head in this country. Do you think we do not know your real name? You fool! You will bring your information here within half an hour of its receipt and you will hire the car as you have said, going with us to secure the petal of Lao-Tze. Its safety is worth a million lives like yours. You do not know what it stands for.

"Even I only know the secret of one of the petals. I can not learn the secret of another until I have achieved wisdom. Only the Dalai Lama himself may aspire to the whole of it. Even the Son of Heaven, the Emperor, knows not and dares not essay its power. Do you think your drug-ridden will may aspire to stand in the way of its recovery? Obey and you shall have your reward. Fail this time and tomorrow you will be beyond all failures. Fool!"

The low sentences were pregnant with power. Even the listener by the door, ignorant as he was of the language, could not fail to understand the threat they bore, thought Keeler. To him the increasing mystery of the talisman was mingled with wonder at his own good fortune in having so evaded the watch that had been maintained over it. He could better understand McVea's reluctance to undertake the recovery of the petal.

Redding's soul seemed to cringe.

"Surely I have done enough?" he cried. "I was ordered to watch the woman. Suppose she has not the petal after all. What if the other still has it. Keeler. It is not my fault if he has slipped through your fingers."

"We know where the man is," said the priest.

The devil you do, thought Keeler. I am glad you don't. I have a distinct feeling that my room at the Biltmore is a safer place than this, though not so interesting.

"We are advised that the woman has the petal. If not, we shall not hold you responsible. And we know its ultimate destination. At the last it holds a power that will defend the profanation of its secret from an infidel and a foreigner. I have spoken. You will report here."

THERE was the sound of moving furniture. The minor priest, fearful of being found listening to the secrets of his superiors, jumped to his feet and darted up the stairs. His startled face encountered Keeler's as the latter rose to his knees. With a punch timed to perfection Keeler's fist caught the Chinaman beneath the jaw and he toppled down the stairs as the door beneath opened and Redding and the priests passed through the drawn curtain. The superior cried out in Mandarin.

"There is some one above! Up with you!"

Knives flashed in the hands of his three fellows as they started up the stairs. The senseless body of the assistant priest delayed them for a second and then the bulky figure of the Minister of Buddha, the image that held the serpent and the sphere, crashed down upon them as Keeler dislodged it and dived behind the hangings and through the open sash to the fire-escape, leaping down the rusty steps and dropping from the final landing to the garden.

Fire spat from above as he ran the length of the yard and vaulted the fence to the alley. Windows went up. A shadow leaped the fence a short distance down the lane. He could hear the pad of swiftly running feet as he raced for the street. The priests were already scrambling over the boards he had just crossed. A bullet sang by him and thudded into the dirt. Ahead, vague figures clustered about the mouth of the alley. He was surrounded by the riff-raff of the neighborhood, all keen to dispose of an intruder who had disturbed any part of the community.

He knew that he might look upon the interference of the police before he was out of the way as a miracle. His pursuers knew the immunity they enjoyed from the scarcity of patrol and their own evil reputation and called to each other in the jargon of a dozen tongues as they followed and tried to head him off. Some one turned loose with an automatic and he dodged from left to right, bent double, finger and palm pressing upon the releases of his gun. A man leaped at him and Keeler fired. The bullet shattered the other's knee and he sprawled, whirling in the alleyway. Keeler leaped over him, his second shot hitting the nearer of two assailants in the shoulder and sending him spinning and clutching at his comrade.

Somewhere a whistle sounded, at once a warning and a call for aid from the nearest patrolman. Instantly the pursuit checked,

Digitized by Google

retreated and faded away as Keeler reached the open street and ran eastward, away from the direction of the whistle. No one followed. A patrol wagon came clanging down the street toward him and explained the sudden lapse of the chase. Keeler shrank into the hallway of a lodging-house before the glare of the headlamps caught him and watched the wagon whirr past before he hurried on, hoping for a passing cab.

He believed that he had run the gauntlet unrecognized. Unless Redding had followed, which was not likely, the priests would know him only by vague description and he preferred to have them believe him asleep in the Biltmore. Evidently Redding had not known he was in the taxicab on Ninety-seventh Street.

He saw a taxi outside a little eating-house, the driver swallowing a cup of coffee on the first stool, and got the man to take him to the Forty-second Street subway; then retraced his steps to his room at the Biltmore.

"No one had asked for him," the clerk informed him over the telephone. Keeler ordered a night messenger and despatched him to the drug-store for his hand-bag. Then he connected with the McAlpin and found that Redding was actually registered.

He was in a quandary. He wanted to report to McVea first thing in the morning, as soon as he could find him. And he wanted to keep in close touch with Redding. He needed a trusty assistant. He had no idea of leaving McVea ignorant of the loss of the petal. It would not be his duty to do so, as he conceived it. It he had only some one in whom he could trust? The thought of Walton, his gold-seeking adventure-mate, came as an inspiration. If he was in New York he could be counted upon.

Walton, when he was not roving, knew only one city and that was Gotham. The last time Keeler had heard from him he was on his way back to raise the capital for another expedition. That had been last November, a week before Keeler left for Tibet. Now it was late June. Walton would not start on his trip to Borneo, the place of his latest discovery, until the rainy season was nearing its end. That would not be until September.

Walton had two rooms where he kept bachelor apartments on West Ninth Street, near Fifth Avenue. Keeler looked it up in the telephone directory, found the number and put in a call, with a suggestion for insistence. The answer came at last.

"Who the devil are you?" came an aggressive though sleepy voice over the wire. "Who? Keeler? You ring-tailed old mongoose, when did you get back? Sure I will come up. Be there in half an hour."

Keeler sighed with relief. Now he had a real man to work with him, one who did not ask questions and shot straight to the last cartridge or spent his last penny at the call of friendship. He gave orders for Walton to be shown up immediately he arrived. The game was not lost yet. Walton could handle Redding while he saw McVea. The petal might yet be retrieved. The fifty thousand was still in sight.

And when I get it, he told himself, I'll match Walton to see whether I put in with him and go to Borneo or he comes jade-hunting with me. Head-hunters and jungle-traps will be a relief after Hsu-Fuan and his tribe.

Yet, when the telephone announced his friend it disturbed a reverie in which Keeler saw Claire Arden speeding north with the bogus McVea.

CHAPTER XIII

THE LEAVES OF LIFE

STUART McVEA surveyed Keeler with a look that seemed striving to search the most secret recess of his soul. The scientist had aged visibly. His iron-gray hair was now snow-white, his hands trembled and his chin shook slightly as he spoke in a voice that quivered with excitement.

"It was well planned," he said. "I do not blame you, Keeler. I can not. I need your help. Look ye, lad, I told ye once this meant more to me than what measure of life was left me. That measure is scantier now. I have guarded it but it ebbs, it ebbs. What ye have told me is more than the attempts of Hsu-Fuan and those who stand far and high beyond him. The treachery is nearer home. Those telegrams——"

He pressed a hand to his heart and took a sip of the tall glass of Scotch and vichy that stood beside him. Keeler had found him easily enough through McKenzie and Menzies. To the lawyers he had said

Digitized by Google

nothing of the events of the night before, merely stating that he had just arrived and wanted to verify the address.

McVea was now living on the top floor of an elaborate apartment building overlooking Riverside Drive, safeguarded not only by a small army of house employees, whose main duty it was to admit only the duly credited to the inmates of the expensive suites, but by two men who sat at desks in an outer room, ostensibly an office-library. They bore all the marks of private detectives. Whether Keeler had been followed or not, he was safe behind these barriers. Meanwhile Walton was playing watchdog to Redding.

"The place on Ninety-seventh Street was watched day and night, ye ken," said McVea. And it could have been raided and none the wiser. This is a fort and a fort I need. I wired ye where to come, of course, and that brings us to the telegrams. We have time to go all through the matter while your friend Walton—ye say he can be trusted—keeps his eye on yon rascal, Redding.

A renegade white man is worse than the lowest Lascar. It is a hard tangle, lad, and ye must help me to untwist it. For the petal we must have. I'll double the reward if ye get it. Understand, ye'll not be losing as it is."

"I don't want anything that I have not earned, Mr. McVea."

"Tush! What is money? Eh? I suppose ye'll be thinking it's the greatest thing on earth. No, ye're too young. It'll be women with you, likely?"

The veins had swollen in his forehead and his face had turned a dull purple but his eyes were bright and questioning. He caught Keeler's look of apprehension and smiled.

"Ye're thinkin' I'm over-exciting mysel'? Ye'll be rememberin' my fear of sclerosis that this Angus McVea told ye I'd died of. We'll risk that. And dinna think I'm fey, lad. I'm askin' wi' a purpose. What do ye think is the greatest thing i' the world? If ye had the grantin' of a wish, what wad ye say? Money, or love or—life?

He bent forward, laying his lean fingers on Keeler's knees, his eyes glittering with intensity, the increasing burr of his dialect showing the excitement that rode him. Keeler felt that the apparently aimless query had something to do with the talisman and McVea's superstitious belief in its magic virtues.

"Why there are other things beside any of those," he said. "Power, genius, friendship, the last perhaps the greatest. Life is long enough to hold full measure of those if one is fortunate."

"Aye, there ye strike it. Life. That is what counts." The scientist's eyes held the glaze of mysticism as he tapped Keeler's knee with bony finger-tips. "What if you could live for centuries? Go on as ye are now, as I am now, wi' a trained brain that can keep up wi' the times as they change. To watch the progress o' the world and march wi' it. Power and money wad be but bit items. Look where the world stands now. On the brink o' great inventions that are i' the egg.

"Ye micht as well pass i' your cradle as to die now. In a century fra now, when men will look back on these warring times as the last stand o' barbarism, and greed be dissolved i' the crucibles o' Science, then, lad, then will be the time to be alive. A week of tomorrows is worth seven years of yesterdays."

"I don't know," said Keeler. "If the privilege were granted to all, you mean?"

"Not yet. In time, maybe. Not in this generation."

Keeler humored him. The man was daft on the one subject.

"I should not care to be the one to try it," he said. "I'll stay with my choice of friendship and not outlive my friends. I suppose you mean the petal——"

"Aye, the petal. I'm trustin' ye wi' the news, lad, for I am the only livin' Caucasian who can solve the secret. Ye're thinkin' I'm fey. Listen.

"There is no legend that doesna' spring fra' truth. There is no gainsayin' that men once lived far beyond the allotted four-score and ten. There is no chronicle, fra' the Vedas to the Bible, that doesna' attest it. I could show ye bricks of ancient Babylon, just discovered——"

For a moment he lapsed into a muse.

"Cathay is no the cradle o' the race, but its chronicles are the A, B, C o' science, which is but the understandin' o' nature. There is naught i' man's physiology that calls for so small a span o' life. Ye know somethin' o' Oriental pheelosophies. Lao-Tze was born six hundred and four years before Christ and none knows when he died.

Digitized by Google

His servant, Senkea, worked for him two hundred years and to him Lao-Tze gave the talisman of life, taking it fra' him when he asked for the siller that was due him. Wi' the passin' o' Lao-Tze passed the secret.

"The Emperor Che Hwang-te sent a Taoist magician to the Golden Isles o' the Blest, somewhere east o' China, where grew the herbs o' immortality and the talisman o' long life was kept. Sen-She, the wizard, failed but ye'll find record o' those who claimed to ha' reached the islands."

"Yet Confucius, who was a pupil of Lao-Tze, died when he was seventy-two. And Buddha was only eighty."

"Ye'll remember that Lao-Tze was ninety years old when Confucius was born and the latter thirty when he visited Lao-Tze. Mayhap Lao-Tze did not care to gi' him the secret. Buddha mayhap achieved immortality through Nirvana in another way. But there are today lamas whose work on the sacred books alone proves that they have lived more than a hundred years. Man, I could gi' you a thousand certitudes. 'Tis a secret known to be i' the possession o' the Grand Lamas. It is mentioned i' the Sacred Books o' Kanjur. It is a part o' the ritual.

"The secret is written on the petals o' the mystic flower which forms the talisman. As a lama acquires merit he learns the secret o' one petal which, wi'out the rest, means naught. Only the Grand Lama knows the whole. Each head priest o' the various orders holds a fac-simile o' the petals to which he has attained. The Grand Lama grants a dispensation o' the sacred draft, compounded by himself, to such as are thocht deservin' and to whom long life is necessary for the performance o' their special task.

Keeler looked, not at McVea, but at the ash of his cigar. He did not want to betray the prominent motive that possessed him, pity. It seemed incomprehensible that a man of McVea's undoubted attainments should seriously allow himself to be dominated by such a jargon, entrapped by the hand-me-down statements of myths that possessed no real authenticity. The bubble of long life was the phantasy of every generation, the wish father to the belief. Lamas undoubtedly were frequently long-lived but such endurance was readily explicable to Keeler by the manner of their lives, passed in quiet pursuits or meditation, lacking all wear and tear of outside influence, existing on the simplest of food.

McVea's Scotch inheritance of mysticism, added to his long delving into the midden-heap of Oriental philosophies, had caused a lesion in his brain. There was a soft spot in which monomania was fostered. In a way it was no concern of his but he made up his mind not to receive anything beyond the price of his original contract. He had earned that, whether he had brought back anything worth a million or a nickel.

MEANTIME he could only humor McVea. There was plenty of time before any action seemed likely to start. Walton was on the job at the McAlpin. Redding had arrived there shortly after two and was locked in his room, not to be disturbed until the clock once more marked that hour, almost certainly drugged to his limit after his interview with the priests.

Keeler was as sure of Walton as he would have been of himself. He had still in mind the house with the awnings and the flower-boxes but there might be several easy explanations and the main play was to get in touch with the chauffeur of the Riret car.

"It has ta'en me a score o' years," went on McVea, "before I got seven o' the petals together. 'Tis a long tale wi' mony chapters. The first petal cam' into my hands by accident an' it was not till the second cam' my way that I got a hint o' what the whole might mean. Since then I ha' scoured the East and, one by one, I got them. All stained wi' blood, lad, all gained thru' death. An eery record. Ye shall see the seven presently.

"I wasna' able to decipher them by my lane but I was able to get the key from a man who is the greatest living expert in Sanscrit, a man who has a star on his cheek and who answers verra well to your description o' Angus McVea. Professor McAdie."

Keeler sat up. The affair was beginning to crystallize.

"Where is he?" he asked.

"Ah, that's the rub. For ye see it couldna ha' been McAdie ye saw last nicht for the verra simple reason that he has been in Central America for several weeks and is now aboard the *Isthmian* which doesna' dock — accordin' to schedule — until the day after tomorrow. I wirelessed to him

Digitized by Google

yesterday mornin' askin' him to come and see me on arrival and I ha' his answer.

"No, lad, 'twas no McAdie but 'twas some one who didna happen to ken that McAdie was off to Guatemala and thocht that a wig an' a painted mole might put me off the track. I'm thinkin' he may ha' had another reason for disguise. Ye were sayin' that there was a sort o' resemblance between this Claire Arden and the man?"

"Yes."

McVea was showing more astuteness than Keeler had given him credit for with his maunderings about the gift of longevity.

"Can ye see anything to suggest that likeness in this picture. I had the photograph taken wi' him as a scale to suggest the general height o' the images by which he is standing."

Keeler scrutinized the print eagerly.

"This is your secretary," he said. "I met him. That's the resemblance. There, about the mouth and chin. It's hardly definable but I have had to be somewhat of a shark on physiognomy in the East. It's the same modeling as I noticed on Claire Arden's lower face. That's Angus McVea. With a black wig and that birthmark!"

"I thocht it might be when ye told me about the telegrams," said McVea. "There were reasons why he might have fancied he had a grudge against me, though he showed no signs o' them. He was a cold-blooded automaton. He could ha' intercepted the telegrams. It would ha' been easy for him to fix up the house on Ninety-seventh Street, my lease has yet a month to run. That's the thief, beyond a doubt, and the girl is his sister, or rather his stepsister."

"What is his name?"

"Cartwright. He started his vacation three days ago at my request. I didna want him around while I prepared the elixir. The lad knew o' your mission and he figures that if it was worth fifty thousand dollars for the one that fetched it, it might be worth a lot more for the one that could secure it and hold it for blackmail. The lad's heid has been turned by the chance o' gettin' a pile o' money. I fancy we shall hear fra him fairly soon wi' a suggestion as to the price he sets on it. But before then we'll be on his trail. The main thing is to circumvent the priests."

Keeler's heart was heavy. Cartwright was a plain thief and Claire Arden his accomplice. That was the secret of the hidden hostility he had sensed in her. She had gone to Shanghai to make sure of the time of his arrival and departure for the States. She was the worst type of adventuress. And he had thought her sneering at his profession! It seemed impossible, yet here was the proof.

"Then you do not know where he has gone in Massachusetts?"

"Naturally not. I kenned that his stepsister—who seems to have been a canny lassie—had a place i' the country. Cartwright said he was ganging there on his vacation. It wad seem he spoke the truth. But where, I did not think to inquire. He told me that his sister had been traveling and that he expected her hame every day. The young de'il seems to have been makin' a good deal o' a mock o' me."

Keeler was looking at McVea in a new light. The mystic had disappeared. This McVea was sane and keen, with a sardonic sense of humor at his own loss. While he had thought him maundering he had all along guessed the mystery.

"That house a few doors from yours on Ninety-seventh," he said aloud. "I suppose he secured a room or rooms there for his sister. He set the stage at your place, visited her and, after dark, they went over the roofs leaving their scuttle open for their return."

"I shouldna wonder whether your hypothesis is correct," said McVea drily. "I believe the house wi' the striped blinds and flower boxes is a high-class boarding place. It was verra simple—and effective."

The room telephone rang on McVea's desk. He picked up the receiver and handed it to Keeler.

"Your friend Walton," he said.

Keeler listened eagerly.

"I am in the next room to Redding," reported Walton. "It was vacated a little while ago and I secured it. He is still asleep or under the drug. There is a bathroom between us and it is locked on his side but I can hear him snoring. If he moves about before long I'll let you know. He'll not get away from me."

Keeler repeated the conversation.

"We can do nothing then but wait," said McVea. "Gin ye'll come into the next room. I'll show ye the seven petals."

He led the way to a room fitted for a museum, filled with Oriental antiquities.

Digitized by Google

It was artificially lighted, the windows being blocked by steel shutters.

"There are bars beyond those," said McVea.

He spun the combination of a wall-safe and threw open the heavy steel door, bringing out a metal box from which he took a circular case covered with purple velvet. Opening this, he exposed the seven petals lying on a bed of white satin. The receptacle had been molded to receive them and they were arranged in the shape of a flower, each petal holding a portion of the center.

Keeler looked with interest at the tarnished bits of gold, wondering at their history.

"Stained wi' blood, gained thru' death, but standing for life," said McVea. "Ye'll note, maybe, that the runes run i' circles and each starts at a different petal. Ye need the eight to read the riddle complete. There are certain metapheesical remarks intended to warn the timid and the rest is a formula or prescription for the decoction o' the elixir. 'Twas for that I had ye bring the herbs. I ha' them already but 'twas as well to gather fresher. Look at them more closely, lad. Ye ha' handled one o' them."

On the reverses showed the dull knobs of gems, the eight sacred stones. Suddenly he took one of the petals closer to the light with an exclamation.

"What is it?" asked McVea.

"Some one has taken casts of these," said Keeler. "See, here is a tiny speck of plaster caught in the setting of the jewel."

McVea snatched the petal from his hand, his face flaming, his eyes blazing.

"Ye're right," he said. "Cartwright is no just a blackmailing thief. He has robbed me o' the secret! He could ha' done it by putting things together! He had the combination! He must ha' got at my translations! He must ha' listened to my talks wi' McAdie! He—he——"

The scientist's face turned purple and he staggered. Keeler caught him and set him in a chair, hurrying to the outer room for whisky. McVea was gasping when he returned but was able to speak.

"I must get a grip o' mysel'," he murmured. "Thank ye, lad, I'll ha' a sip o' that. Dilute—wi' vichy. The crafty de'il," he muttered. "And I thocht him a cold-bluided automaton. There's a drawer at the bottom o' the safe, Keeler. Here's the key. Open it and bring it to me."

The drawer was divided into several compartments beneath a double lid that closed tightly enough to practically exclude the air. Lifted, it showed a dozen or more varieties of dried herbs and bulbs, some of which showed a resemblance to those Keeler had brought from Tibet. McVea started to displace them with trembling fingers. Beneath the top layers the divisions had been half-filled with sawdust. The scientist groaned.

"He left them so I would not think they had been disturbed," he said. "I ha' glanced at them once in a while to mak' sure they were safe. Get doon to yon hotel, Keeler, and get the truth fra that scoundrel o' a Redding. Dinna tak' a chance, lad. Yon Cartwright has stolen my verra life!"

CHAPTER XIV

THE CHAUFFEUR TALKS

"HE'S snoring yet," said Walton. "There's a call for him for two o'clock. That would give him time to dress before his chauffeur shows up. How are you going to handle him? I was going to pose as a Federal detective until you got here. I imagine you have only to mention the name Adler to scare him."

"It's a toss-up whether he is more afraid of the priests or the penitentiary," said Keeler. But I think he'll come through. He'll not be overfit after he wakes up. Perhaps we can get to him before he takes another shot. It may be as well to bargain with him. If I promise him immunity and the thousand dollars he was to have got from the priests he will likely jump at the chance to get clear of it all.

"McVea gave me enough money. By the way, you come in on this, Walton, if you'll stick through with the trip. It is McVea's secretary who has turned the trick and McVea is desperate. He has promised practically any amount for your services."

"I'm working with you, Keeler. I don't know McVea. If we get back this talisman thing I'll give him a chance to subscribe to my expeditionary fund. I'm shy a few thousands. What makes him value this petal so highly?"

Keeler told him, talking low to catch any unusual sound from Redding's room. Their own door was ajar and the door to the bathroom on their side open. Redding's

Digitized by Google

stertorous breathing was clearly audible.

"Dippy," was Walton's terse comment. "I thought all the Ponce de Leon's were dead. The bigger the apple the more it rots, though his brain seems sound enough otherwise. But it's funny how the legend sticks. I never ran across a tribe yet that didn't have some yarn or other about a fountain of youth or a tree of life. Listen."

The telephone bell was ringing in Redding's room. Keeler and Walton tiptoed into the bathroom. The gongs sounded three times before there was a stir on the bed and the shuffling drag of a man's feet across the floor.

"Two o'clock? All right. Give me the dining-room."

Keeler nudged his friend and nodded. It was Redding's voice. There was a little pause for the connection.

"Dining-room? A pot of coffee, extra strong, for Room Nine-two-four. No. Nothing to eat. And hurry."

A hand caught fumblingly at the other side of the bathroom door. It opened as the lock was shot back. Keeler found time for a swift whisper.

"Follow my lead." Walton nodded.

Redding, unshaved, red-rimmed of eyes, generally haggard, drew back in consternation as Keeler followed him into his own room. Walton, behind his friend, quietly reset the bolt.

"What the devil do you want?" asked Redding. "Get out of my room or I'll have you thrown out."

Keeler smiled at the bluster.

"Sit down, Redding," he said. "We can tell you what we want simply enough. When your friend the chauffeur arrives we want to be present at the conversation. You can introduce us as two friends of yours who are going to make that trip with you and you can go ahead and find out where he drove Miss Arden to last night just as you expected to."

The doctor's face was a ludicrous mask of surprise and consternation. He licked his dry lips in the effort at speech. A knock came at the door.

"That's your coffee," said Keeler. "Walton, will you take it in? Keep still, Redding."

The warning was superfluous. Redding had sunk on the bedside in a state of semi-collapse. Walton took in the coffee, tipped the boy and poured out a steaming cup.

"Drink it up," suggested Keeler, "while I finish. When you've got this address we are going to take the trip in the car instead of the priests on Forty-seventh Street. You have probably guessed that I was the man in the gallery of the temple last night. I imagine you do not mind double-crossing your *T'au-t'ie* comrades if your getaway is clear. I will give you one thousand dollars in cash. You can come with us and switch off at the railroad to Boston where you can ship out of the country.

Redding was looking a little better after finishing the coffee.

"Who is your friend?" he asked.

"If I were you, Redding, I would not inquire too particularly into his business. You might become unpleasantly acquainted with him. It is lucky for you he is my friend. If I should happen to tell him your right name you would not find him one of yours, I fancy. Mr. Walton is not a Federal employee, but——"

He shrugged his shoulders, leaving Redding's imagination to supply the gap.

"I may be compounding a felony in letting you get out of the country, Redding," Keeler went on, "but your troubles are not specifically my affair unless you force me to make them so. Here is the money I promised you. It is yours as soon as we get the information. Otherwise I shall have to introduce you formally to Mr. Walton."

"If—if you were in the gallery," said Redding in thick-tongued syllables, "you know what will happen to me if I do not report to them."

"That is distinctly your own affair. If I remember right, you boasted of your own ability to protect yourself. It should be easier for you to dodge them than Uncle Sam's officials." He nodded toward Walton who sat silent, looking lean and tanned and eminently efficient.

"How do I know you won't double-cross me after you give me the thousand?"

Keeler turned toward Walton in apparent disgust.

"It's just as I thought, Walton," he said. "I can stay here and meet the chauffeur. No doubt the thousand will loosen his tongue. This gentleman's real name is——"

"No, no," gasped Redding. "—— you, Keeler, you've got me in the corner. I'll do it. The man will be here any minute now. You can get what you want and give me that money. But I'll not go with you. I

Digitized by Google

have arranged things so I can get away." He fumbled in the pocket of the dressing-gown he had put on over his pajamas, produced a phial and shook out a pellet. It fell from his shaking palm to the carpet and he tried to pick it up. Keeler retrieved it.

"Only the one until we are through with this business," he said.

THE telephone rang and Keeler motioned to Redding to answer. The latter washed down his pellet with the dregs of his coffee and answered the call.

"Send him up," he said, then turned to the others.

"It's Sprague, the chauffeur," he said.

They sat silent until Sprague arrived.

Capable enough but not above fattening his account with repair percentages, thought Keeler. Redding greeted the man cordially.

"Hello, Sprague," he said. "Here we are. These gentlemen are my friends who expect to make that trip with me. Just get in?"

Sprague nodded at Keeler and Walton.

"Car's outside," he said. "I'm going to put it up and turn in. I'm dead for sleep. I only got two hours of it."

"Bad trip?" asked Keeler. "How are the roads? You went up into Massachusetts, Mr. Redding tells us."

"Roads are all right," answered Sprague with a yawn. "It's the night driving that wears you out especially when you are in a hurry. Is there such a thing as a drink in the house?"

Keeler ordered over the phone.

"How soon can you start with us?" he asked. "We are all ready."

"Not till tomorrow morning for mine. The car needs overhauling and I need sleep. I had a hard time keeping awake on the way back. Your health!"

He tossed off the highball that had arrived with cigars.

"Well," said Keeler, resuming the lead that he had taken, "we'll have to wait for you. Mr. Redding says you were highly recommended." He looked toward the doctor who took his cue.

"Best man in New York, they told me. Where did you go, Joe?" The question was admirably careless.

"Why, it was supposed to be a secret," said Sprague with a wink. "Looked to me like an elopement. If it was, the guy sure got a good-looker."

Keeler poured him out another drink.

"The man meets her at the train yesterday morning," went on the man, "and we drives her to a swell house in the Nineties. You guys ain't newspaper folk, are you? You don't look like it, of course," he went on, swallowing the liquor that, on the top of his long drive, was making him loquacious. "No offense intended. Then they sends me back to the garage until they calls up. That's where I meets Mr. Redding and he gives me a twenty to hold me for your trip, like a sport.

"I suppose they gets hitched. Anyway I'm tipped to come back a-hiking to the dump. They wait on the steps and I opens the door and slacks down. In they hops and off we go. There was a guy comes up behind us in a roadster, her old man maybe. The guy tells me to slip it into the high and off we slides, Gretna Green style. It ain't the first time I've played Cupey. We hit the high spots and makes Hoosac Falls at five-thirty this morning.

"I leaves 'em in Honeymoon Lodge all right, white house with green blinds and roses all over it, apples in the orchard, regular little garden of Eden ready-made, with the name on the gate. Sweetbrier Lodge. He slips me my dough with a ten-spot to the good, and, believe me, he had some roll with him. I gives them my blessing and drives off to get something to eat and feed the old boat some juice at the garage at Hoosac Falls, cops a couple of hours' snooze and starts back."

"Pretty place, Hoosac Falls?" put in Walton.

"Regular Summer-dump. Three hotels, fourteen boarding-houses, two garages and the village blacksmith. It's on the railroad. The turtle doves are hid behind the hill a mile away from the vacationers. We'll pass it tomorrow if you gents are going over the Mohawk Trail. What time do you want to start?"

"We'll ring up the garage and let you know this evening," said Keeler. "Have another drink—and a fresh cigar?"

The moment the man left Keeler tossed the thousand dollars to Redding.

"There's your getaway," he said. "Walton, will you find out about the trains. If there's one soon we can make better time that way, since there's a garage in the

Digitized by Google

village. You'll come with us Redding and make your connections to Boston or wherever you want to go."

"What for? I told you I had made my own plans already."

"Certainly. And those plans might include trying to collect another thousand dollars from the priests. They have probably got some one keeping tabs on both you and me at the present moment. Walton and I will look out for that. You will be much safer in our escort than by yourself. And you will not part company with us until we reach Hoosac Falls. Get dressed as soon as you can. If there is no train we'll hire a car."

He walked over to the door and locked it, pocketing the key.

"Leave the bathroom doors open, Redding," he warned as he went into the next room where Walton was busy at the telephone.

"We're in luck, Keeler," said the latter as he hung up. "Through express leaves Grand Central in thirty minutes and will stop on request at Hoosac Falls. Better tell him to get a move on," he added

Keeler called out to Redding. Getting no answer, he passed through to the latter's room. Redding lay across the bed, still in his dressing-gown. A hypodermic syringe lay near one nerveless hand. Keeler lifted the heavy lids and saw the contracted pupils. He turned to Walton who had followed him.

"Spineless as a jelly-fish," he said. "He's plugged himself as the easiest way out of the present trouble."

"Not dead, is he?"

"No, but if he took a full dose, or half what the syringe holds, on top of that pellet just now and the hold-over from last night, he'll be dead to the world for several hours. He's been a shrewd devil in his day but he's come to the place where he shirks the pass when it looks perilous. Didn't trust us, I suppose. Well, we can't bring him to and as long as he is harmless we are just as well off.

"You hike down to the Grand Central and get tickets. The train will make time considering what we'd waste in finding a fast car and possible breakdowns. I am going to play tag through the subway for any of the priesthood who may be trailing me. The sub is a gorgeous place for hide and seek."

CHAPTER XV

SWEETBRIER LODGE

THE train was an express that made accommodation stops only after it began to reach the vacation country in the Lower Berkshires. Walton sat in his chair in the club-car, comfortably relaxed between actions, looking with friendly shrewdness at Keeler who sat, an unlit cigar between his lips, frowning out of the window.

Now, I wonder, pondered the gold-hunter, what is worrying his Majesty? It isn't the recovery of the talisman, for we are on the trail and its warm, and King doesn't act that way when trigger-time comes. I'll bet it's the girl. Poor devil. She's good to look at and bad under the rind like a bush mango. Well, the quickest way to immunity is through vaccination. After the fever goes down I'll carry him off to Borneo.

Keeler sat up, reached for a match from the box by the window, lighted his cigar and shook off his reverie. Walton had judged rightly. He had been puzzling over the girl. From some standpoints, the attempt to steal a secret of such magnitude, if one really believed in it, was perhaps more excusable than a theft for purposes of extortion but Keeler saw no difference between the millionaire robber-baron and the porch-climber, save a greater rascality. Walton was right. *Gare la femme!* He smiled as he caught his friend's quizzical expression.

"Got a gun with you?" he asked.

"First thing I put in my pocket after I got home from your hotel last night. Think this Cartwright chap'll put up a fight?"

"I don't know but I'm not going to waste any time over it. That petal is worth just fifty thousand dollars to me in cold cash and I'm going to get it."

"That's better."

"How's that?"

"As long as a man keeps his mind on material matters he is sure to be fairly sane—and happy. I was afraid you were allowing the sentimental Irishman to lead the canny Scotchman by the hand. What are you going to do with Cartwright after you get back your talisman? And what are you going to do with the girl?"

"I don't know. McVea won't bother about anything that may lead to publicity. Let them both go to—wherever they want to go, I suppose."

Digitized by Google

"Do you imagine that McVea really expects his charm to work. He must be a driveling idiot."

"He's ridden a hobby until it's become a mania, that's all, and he's likely to go insane if he loses the chance to try it. The funny thing about it is that he won't be able to tell if it works. It isn't to rejuvenate him, from what he says, only indefinitely preserve him as he is. I don't know what is in the formula besides those herbs. Dried sea-horse, mandrake and ginseng, powdered tigers' claws and all the hodge-podge of the Oriental pharmacœpia, I imagine. Look here, Walton, we'd better get something to eat. We can get a steak and a highball. What do you say to it?"

"It shows me you've banished sentiment for business. I'm with you."

They ate their meal at the rear of the club-car. The train was on time and as they sipped their coffee the porter came up.

"Hoosac Falls next station," he said. "You gents getting off there? No hurry. Ten minutes."

As Keeler rose from his seat Walton reached across the table and pulled him down.

"Don't get too close to the window," he said. "They might look up. Isn't that our friend Redding in that car with the driver. And those gentlemen in the tonneau are rice-eaters for a thousand dollars."

An automobile was passing the train. The road was rough where it ran parallel to the tracks and the chauffeur was bending over his wheel trying to combine speed with safety. The man beside him glanced at the train, then turned and said something to his companions who looked in the same direction.

Keeler and Walton were well back and swiftly withdrew from the angle of sight. But there was no doubt about it being Redding and, to their trained eyes, the men in the tonneau, three of them, despite their conventional attire and the dust goggles they all wore, were Orientals. The car passed the bad stretch and shot ahead, going sixty miles to the train's forty.

"He fooled me," said Keeler. "It was a clever trick. He knew the symptoms well enough to sham them effectively and I didn't remember that the one pellet would have temporarily fixed his pupils. They'll have to slow down a bit or they'll run afoul of a village constable. But they've got the start on us. That's a good car they managed to get hold of. We'll have to hustle, Walton."

The gold-hunter nodded, his eyes matching Keeler's in their bright intensity. For the moment the men looked as alike as twins, their faces alight with purpose and the excitement of the close race, jaws set firm, lips tight, every movement deftly swift as they prepared to leave the car. The well-tipped porter stood aside as the train slowed up at Hoosac Falls and they dropped from the step and sprinted across the gravel platform and over the street of the Summer resort to where a huge sign spelled:

JONES GARAGE AND MOTOR LIVERY

"Nothing doing, that I can recommend," grinned the proprietor with a look at a battered flivver that was the only machine in the place. "Business is a-humming. You might try Bailey's, down street."

Within the minute they were gazing at a motor-cycle which the accommodating Bailey, scenting their eagerness, offered them as the only thing to be procured on wheels, with an engine attachment.

"Picnic up to the Falls," he volunteered. "That's my machine. How fur might ye be going?"

Walton looked dubiously at the contrivance.

"Ever ride one?" he asked Keeler.

"Not yet, but I'm going to try. Show me how it works," he demanded of the owner.

"Wal, ef you're goin' to experiment I'd ruther not trust ye with it."

"How much is it worth? Here, take this for a deposit." He thrust several bills into Bailey's hands. "If we don't come back you can buy a new one. Now, then, give me the hang of this."

The hands and brain that had conquered all sorts of gas-driven contrivances from pumps to broken-down auxiliary boat-motors soon compelled respect from the wondering Bailey, already placated by the feel of cash.

"She's filled up," he said. "I'll start ye."

"Where's Sweetbrier Lodge?" asked Keeler as he mounted.

"'Bout two miles up street. Two hills. Ye cross the brook after the second and the cottage is on the right. Fellow just asked

Digitized by Google

me where it was. You looking for them? In a Danton, they was."

Walton was on the seat behind Keeler, his hands on the latter's shoulders. The garage man, yelled after them:

"Let 'er out to the full ef ye're in a hurry. She'll make the hill on high."

They were off in a pounding, jumping rush, the dry dust hiding them from Bailey's vision. He turned over the crisp bills.

"I should worry ef they break their necks," he said aloud as he put the price of two machines into his wallet. "Somethin' doin' over to the cottage. Ef it warn't so blamed hot I'd walk up there. Those fellers meant business."

THE gasping, snorting machine rocketed over the first hill, swooped into the valley and roared up the second incline. The road curved at the foot of the hill and they skidded violently through the soft dust. The Danton car was drawn up by the side of the road and they narrowly avoided it as the driver swore at them. Keeler stopped the machine and they sprang off leaving it against the white palings of a cottage garden.

Keeler swung wide the gate with the inscription Sweetbrier Lodge and they passed through. Under the cloudless sky the place seemed far remote from tragedy. Bees boomed through the air and the perfume of old-fashioned flowers filled the little garden with incense. It sloped by a lawn to the alder-fringed brook where the ripples flowed in a noisy treble. Somewhere in the little house a woman was singing. It was the same voice and the same song that Keeler had last heard in the bungalow at Shanghai and the words seemed to voice the tragedy that brooded about the spot, unseen and apparently unsuspected by the singer.

Un peu d'espoir et puis, bon soir.

"A little hope—and then farewell," Keeler translated as he stepped on to the porch, marveling how she could sing so light-heartedly, knowing her brother to be the thief of an object whose possession was always dangerous.

He strode through the door, Walton close behind him, and guided by the song, went through a passage and so to an old-fashioned kitchen. A little maid was polishing some silver at one table, at another stood Claire Arden in a simple gown, her sleeves rolled to the elbows, pinching pastry. She turned at the sound of their footsteps and her face blanched whiter than the flour on the board in front of her.

Then her lips closed firmly, her chin went up and her eyes looked at his defiantly, mastering their surprise.

"Where is your brother, Cartwright? Quickly. The *T'au-t'ie* are after him with Redding. Their car is outside. We tried to get here first. It is a question of his life."

For a moment her eyes challenged his, suspecting a trick.

"But you——"

"Never mind my affairs. They can wait. Has he left the house?"

"He went back to the spring in the grove, at the top of the hill behind the house, across the brook."

Keeler followed her glance through the window, drew his automatic and flung open the kitchen door.

"Come on, Walton," he called and started to run through the orchard.

Walton hurdled the low fence beyond the apple-trees one stride behind Keeler. A moment later Claire Arden broke from the house and followed them. She ran almost as fast as they did. A fleck of color had mounted in either cheek and she carried a rifle.

Beyond the orchard the land mounted in long slopes to the wooded ridge. They ran knee-high through grass and wild blossoms. A shot cracked sharply in the woods to their right and some one shouted. Keeler wheeled in that direction.

"Cover to the left, Walton," he shouted. "They are after him."

A figure broke from the trees and fled wildly downhill, plunging into a thicket that seemed to mark the length of a deep gully. After him raced a man who fired twice and broke into the brush after the fugitive. A third followed. Keeler swore as he pushed his pace to the utmost. A good quarter of a mile separated them. He heard the whip-snap of a weapon of heavier caliber and the third man threw up his arms, whirled and fell headlong, rolling down the incline. Keeler glanced over his shoulder as he ran.

Claire Arden was standing beside Walton who knelt with the rifle in his hand. The gold-hunter waved him on.

Keeler smashed through the heavy herbage of the brush and plunged into the gully.

Digitized by Google

Its bottom was rank with ferns. For an instant he paused uncertain which way to turn. It was very still and hot in the shallow glen and the ferns were motionless. Then a shrill shriek rang out below him and he rushed in the direction of the sound.

The ferns ceased at the edge of a circle of marsh where purple irises grew rife. Face-down among the lilies, clad in knickerbockers and a white silk shirt that was sopping scarlet on one side and shoulder, lay McVea's secretary. Ploughing through the boggy ground, almost across the marsh, ran a short man in black clothes with a black derby hat on the back of his head. He skipped high as Keeler fired and leaped forward gaining the waist-high bracken that merged into a tandle of brambly bush.

Cartwright twisted a chalky face upward as Keeler reached him.

"He's got it," he gasped.

The man in black had stopped and knelt in the cover of the ferns. Keeler caught a brief glimpse of the Oriental features as he jumped to one side while three shots in rapid succession came from the brake. Then the ferns waved as the priest ran through them bent double.

He'll never get through the brambles, thought Keeler. He's fired six shots. If it's an automatic he's got two more anyway. This was his game and he played it, dropping to a crouch and watching the bushes. The high twigs shook and chattering birds flew up. He rose and fired low. Something thrashed about in the thicket and rolled back among the ferns. Ready to fire, suspecting treachery, Keeler made his way to the spot.

The priest writhed on his back, his fingers twisted in the stalks of the ferns that he had uptorn in his agony. His legs were motionless. Keeler's bullet had caught him in the small of the back, grazing if not breaking the spine. A gun glittered on the ground. One look showed Keeler that it was a revolver. The priest's lips twisted back from his gums in a snarl and his beady eyes glittered evilly as the other dropped beside him.

"Where is it?" demanded Keeler.

He felt small compunction for the success of the shot. The man's blood was on his own head. The monk, an old man, probably the head-priest of the New York Lhakkang, thought Keeler, as he marveled at the strength and speed the ancient had shown in the chase, grinned at him with teeth stained and worn, and passed into unconsciousness.

Keeler dexterously searched him. Back in the woods two more pistol-shots cracked, followed by the bark of the rifle. There was no sign of the talisman. He unclenched the crooked fingers of the priest's right hand and then those of the left and found nothing but the broken fern stalks. Then he caught sight of the stiff hat, lying bowl upward, showing a lining of white satin, strangely incongruous in the glade.

AS HE reached for it the priest's eyes opened sufficiently to show a gleam of white and his trunk shifted convulsively. Keeler picked up the hat and ran his fingers beneath the leather sweatband. It had been wadded to fit the head and between wadding and felt he found the petal of gold. It was sticky with blood.

As he stood up he heard Claire Arden's cry of distress. In her linen dress, bibbed with the big apron, she was crouched beside Cartwright, his head in her lap, the apron dabbed with his blood. Slipping the talisman into his fob he hurried through the swamp and knelt down.

"Let me see him," he said. "I don't believe it's fatal. Too much blood."

Cartwright looked up.

"No—shots—hit—me," he said feebly. "He caught me—and—I—tripped. Knife in shoulder."

Keeler stripped off the shirt and undervest. A slash from a sharp blade had gone through the shoulder muscles and swerved as it met the shoulder-blade.

"We must get him to the house and find a doctor," said Keeler. "He mustn't lose any more blood."

Claire Arden took off her apron and they tore it into strips, improvising temporary bandages above a compress of moss from the edge of a tiny pool in the marsh. While they were still busy Walton shouted to them from the edge of the gully.

"I got the first chap in the arm," he said as he reached them. "The other is loose somewhere in the woods. Too many trees. They won't bother us. I took away the gun from number one. Cartwright badly hurt?"

The two men picked up the secretary between them, carrying him as gently as they could, the girl walking beside them, her face anxious.

Digitized by Google

"Suppose I go ahead and get a doctor?" she suggested. "There is a telephone in the house. I shall tell him——"

"Tell him there has been an accident," said Keeler. "You have a barn? And a scythe?" The girl looked at him blankly, nodding yes to his queries.

"All right. Scythe usually hangs on wall. Your brother bumped against the boards and brought it down. Sharp tip cut his shoulder. It is possible and plausible."

She flashed him a swift look of gratitude and ran down the hill as lightly as a boy.

"Kill your man?" asked Walton.

"It's hard to say. We'll have to go back as soon as we get Cartwright settled. This isn't China and we are liable to get tied up in a bad mess. But I got the talisman. Look!"

From the brow of the slope they could see the road beside Sweetbrier Lodge. As they gazed a man ran up to the waiting automobile and scrambled in beside the driver. Almost instantly the car started with a splutter and sped up the hill.

"Redding," commented Keeler grimly. "He would do that. And he had better keep going. If the priests catch him now, or later, his life will go out like a snuffed candle."

The girl came flying back to meet them and they bore Cartwright in to his own room and laid him on the bed. He came back to consciousness for a moment and then lapsed into the coma of weakness. The girl bent over him without a thought for anything else. The doctor, she told them, would be there inside of half an hour.

"We have got to find out what happened to those priests," said Keeler.

She did not seem to hear him. Walton touched him on the arm. If the priest has been killed it was imperative that they take some steps in the matter. As they went out, Walton looked at his watch.

"The next train back leaves in sixty-five minutes," he said. "If you like, old man, you go ahead and I'll clean up this mess somehow, if I have to bury the body."

"Thanks, Walton, but we'll see it through together. He fired at me with the full desire to put me out of business. I was justified. Where is the chap you winged?"

He got back into cover when number three tried to pot me with a pistol at fifty yards. He could walk well enough."

They reached the swamp and crossed it. The old priest was gone. Even the hat had disappeared. The soft turf beneath the fern was trampled and the undergrowth crushed. The two read the signs.

"Packed him away on the back of the sound one," said Keeler. Walton nodded acquiescence. "That lets us out of it. No use going back to the house. The doctor will be there in a few minutes. I suppose the motor-cycle is where we left it."

"If there was time, I'd vote trundling the blamed thing back again," said Walton. "I've been on the back of a wild mustang and fought out a gale in a swampy dingey but I'll confess that I had the most unpleasant minutes of my life on that contraption with you skidding all over the landscape."

Bailey of the garage received them with a blend of surprise and chagrin as he deducted the hire of the machine and they walked over to the station.

"No need to bother about the *T'au-t'ie* gang for a while," said Keeler as they settled themselves in the train. "The old fellow was the brains of the outfit and he won't be fit for much for a while. I suppose Redding collected another thousand from them. I should have liked to have talked that over with him but I imagine we've seen the last of him."

CHAPTER XVI

CLAIRE ARDEN EXPLAINS

STUART McVEA received them with enthusiasm as he examined the golden petal.

"I knew you would get it, my lad," he said. "And I have to thank you also, Mr. Walton. I trust you will consider this a satisfactory recompense. I have made out a certified check for you for a hundred thousand dollars, Keeler, as I promised."

"Then I must ask you to change it," said Keeler. "Frankly, Mr. McVea, I would rather abide by the original contract. I think you are placing a fictitious value on the talisman."

"Ah, say ye so? Well, we shall see. I want you to meet Professor McAdie. These are the gentlemen who have just recovered the eighth petal for me, McAdie. Mr. Keeler brought it from Tibet."

They shook hands with the expert, Keeler looking curiously at the man impersonated by Cartwright.

Digitized by Google

"I wonder if he believes in that long-life bunk?" said Walton as they finally left the apartment house.

"I hardly fancy that McVea has told him," replied Keeler. "I imagine he secured the root-forms of the characters from McAdie but he would not trust the final translation."

"Well, he is a generous old chap. A thousand dollars for twenty-four hours work is not to be sniffed at. You chucked away fifty thousand clear yourself but I can understand your prejudice."

"I bargained to bring back something for the first price," said Keeler. "To take the extra amount when I believe the thing is a fake would be taking advantage of a semi-lunatic."

"What are you going to do next? Come with me to Borneo?"

"That or take you with me to Burmah for the jade."

"I can't do that. I've enlisted capital in this other proposition and it is a winner. Placer gold as big as hickory nuts, plus considerable excitement in securing it. The natives are not what you might call hospitable. One thing you are going to do though, and that is move your things to my diggings. Come with me or not I want your help in getting my outfit together."

"I've got to get my own," said Keeler. "We may be able to combine the two expeditions. The clean-up will be fairly quick in both places, I imagine."

For a week they discussed outfits to their hearts' content, looked up routes and rough charts, reveled in the making out of lists of requirements and talked of old adventures. Walton smiled quietly sometimes as he watched the weaning of Keeler from the sentiment with which he had thought his friend infected.

They mentioned Cartwright once or twice together with the name of his sister. The priests had disappeared from the horizon. Once McVea had called them up and told Keeler in a jubilant voice that the formula would be complete within three days, offering once more the second fifty thousand, which Keeler refused.

"Ye'll come and see me before ye leave," said McVea. "I ha' taken a fancy to ye, lad, outside of the service you rendered. Come on Thursday, early in the afternoon. McAdie will be here and I shall be holding a wee reception wi' the three o' us."

WEDNESDAY morning Keeler stepped out of a sporting-goods store on Fifth Avenue and turned south, to encounter Claire Arden. She stopped, holding out her hand, color rising to her pale face.

"I have been hoping to see you, Mr. Keeler," she said. "Trying to locate you. I want to have a talk with you. There are some things to be explained and then, if you will, I should like to ask your advice."

He looked at her gravely. In the companionship of the last few days, the eminently man-stuff of the association with Walton, he had fancied himself freed from whatever fascination she had held for him. Now he knew that he was glad to see her, that he had been hoping to do so.

She stood for something in his life that, once displaced, would leave a gap, an ache, a constant longing for something that Fate had designed for him. He had always suspended judgment upon her actions. They had been inspired by her stepbrother and the circumstances might be utterly extenuating. It was only fair to talk the matter out. With a man he would have insisted upon doing so at Hoosac Falls and now, that she asked . . . .

"I am going away soon," he said "To Burmah. When do you want to see me?"

"Why not now? We can go to the place where I am staying. With my stepbrother. He is doing fairly well. Perhaps you will see him too. It would be only fair to him. Will you come?"

"Where is it? On Ninety-seventh Street?"

She flushed slightly, knowing he was remembering the details of the trap set for him.

"Yes."

At the next crossing Keeler secured an unemployed cab and they rode in silence to the boarding-house. The last time they had ridden together had been down to the wharf in Honolulu from the Wing-Wo-Wang bazaar when he had bought her the carnation leis, and she had said that she would like to be his friend. It seemed a very long time ago now.

He followed her into a room fitted as a library back of the conventional reception room. Long windows opened to a balcony that overlooked a garden. She excused herself for a few moments and returned without her hat and coat, her hair resplendent in the sun that came through the glass.

Digitized by Google

"We shall be quite private here," she said as she pulled down the blinds half-way, shutting off the glare and seating herself, back to the window. "I have secured us from interruption. I shall not keep you very long."

"My mother married Richard Cartwright," she said in a low voice. "He was a constructing engineer for certain roads projected in China. He already had a son nearly twenty years old. Two days before the Boxer riots culminated in Pekin a priest ran into our compound, pursued by Boxers. I was only seven years old then."

Making you twenty-four now, computed Keeler silently.

"I do not remember much of the incident. I did not see it. But the man was horribly wounded by knives. My stepfather drove the Boxers away and did what he could for the priest. It was not much, the man died within the hour. But, tucked in the folds of his waist-cloth, was a golden petal covered with strange writing. Mr. Cartwright kept it, more as a souvenir than from any idea of especial value, I think. At any rate, two days later we were forced to seek shelter with the rest in the British Legation, and it was temporarily forgotten. When the rescue came we left Peking for Shanghai.

The engineering projects were of course abandoned. My stepfather lost all his money and the destruction of the plans for which he had been working for years seemed to sap his interest in life. He was no longer young and the next year he died. We, my mother, my stepbrother and myself, came to America and lived for a while at Hoosac Falls. My mother was born there and owned the farm at Sweetbrier Lodge. It was not fertile or, at that time, of any value. She died when I was eighteen.

"In the meantime my stepbrother had secured a position as secretary with Stuart McVea in New York. He lived with Mr. McVea and took charge of his affairs when the latter was traveling, which was the greater part of the time up to two years ago. Richard got the position partly through his knowledge of Mandarin—I retained mine by using it with Richard, mainly for the fun of having a language of our own—but principally, though he did not realize it at the time, from his possession of this golden petal.

"He showed it to Mr. McVea at their second interview, knowing him to be a collector of Oriental curios. Mr. McVea seemed interested at once and said that he had another petal just like it. It was of some value, he said, and he offered Richard the position and a hundred dollars in cash for the petal, the sale being a condition of the engagement.

"I did not know until—until you came to Hoosac Falls—the secret of the petal, or rather that of the completed flower. I want you to realize that."

She spoke with intense earnestness and Keeler inclined his head. He had been hoping to hear something of the sort.

"I did not know that my brother had obtained casts of the petals that rightly belonged to Mr. McVea, nor that he had taken certain drugs, copied private notes and listened to certain conversations that Mr. McVea had with Professor McAdie. He has only told me everything since he was hurt. I am not attempting to excuse my brother."

"Your stepbrother," corrected Keeler.

"My stepbrother. He was carried away, first by the belief that he was wronged, secondly by the same mania that has possessed Mr. McVea. I only knew that he came up to Hoosac Falls one Summer greatly excited and told me that Mr. McVea had deceived him as to the value of the petal, that his employer was spending enormous sums to secure other petals and that the completed flower held a secret of incalculable value.

"He was strangely wrought up over what he described as Mr. McVea's treachery. Richard is a peculiar character, Mr. Keeler. I think that his life in China must have warped his own nature. He is secretive, highly strung beneath an exterior that is rarely demonstrative, save to me. No real brother could be kinder, have done more for me. We were very poor and, since my mother's death, he has spent almost everything he earned on me, on my education and my happiness.

"He spoke to Mr. McVea about the value of the petal, being sufficiently in touch with his private affairs to know the money that was being spent for the others. Mr. McVea laughed at him. He is a man who is lavish on expenditures to follow his own whims, parsimonious to pennies in the affairs of others. He made no secret of the fact that he would have paid much more to get the petal from Richard but scoffed at the idea of any further recompense. Richard wanted to send me to Wellesley.

Digitized by Google

"I had set my heart on going and he managed to let me go, at what sacrifices of his own I was too young and selfish to consider. But he considered that Mr. McVea had robbed him. Even then he did not know the actual value of the talisman, its stupendous value as he conceived it. But he bided his time and as he learned more, resolved to secure this magic formula. When Mr. McVea secured your services Richard told me a part of his plans. I had long been indignant at the way Mr. McVea treated Richard's work; he used him as if he had been a machine, demanding all his time for a pittance.

"Richard did not tell me all. I did not share the Oriental way he looked at things, I should have thought, as I do now, that the idea was chimerical, absurd. He told me that McVea had robbed him, that he had a chance to secure this petal which was similar to the one McVea had got from him on false pretenses, that, with it in hand the others increased in value and his possession of it would force McVea to restitution.

"He was everything to me, had been everything. I was eager to repay him. I I went to Shanghai to watch for your arrival and, as McVea's automatic secretary it was easy for him to manipulate the telegrams. He persuaded McVea to move and —you know the rest. I met you. To me you were part of the conspiracy to defraud my brother. Then—you were different. I saw your side of it, that you entered into the contract from a sheer spirit of adventure. After Honolulu—" she faltered.

"After Honolulu," she went on, "I made up my mind that, while I must keep faith with Richard, it was not fair to you to carry out the plan as we had first arranged it. We could not begin to give you fifty thousand dollars. A year ago we could have given you nothing. I should have given up the attempt, or I should have wired Richard and told you everything then."

HER eyes met Keeler's with the first hint of shyness he had ever seen in them and it thrilled him.

"Just before I started for Shanghai a valuable bed of iron ore was discovered back of the farm that my mother left to me. It extended into the hill where the trees grow, where Richard was stabbed, at the spring that day. They had made me an offer for the hill but Richard had advised me not to sell. I cabled from Honolulu to close. The money was waiting for me when I arrived in New York.

"That was the ten thousand dollars your brother offered me?"

"Yes. We were not thieves. Richard told me that the money he expected to get from McVea would be an enormous amount and I meant later to see that you got the whole of the fifty thousand. But it was vital that we secured the petal before you saw McVea. We had to get it that night and so, when you refused the ten thousand we carried out the plan that Richard had evolved. Of course the secret is nonsense but Richard believed, still believes in it. As does McVea.

"I suppose the petals are really worth what Richard told you when he posed as Angus McVea, perhaps a thousand dollars apiece. But I can not make him see that. The loss has retarded his recovery, the fever will not disappear, his life is in danger. He is often delirious, he threatens you and McVea, he is growing steadily weaker.

"When—when I told you I should like to be your friend, I meant it. You have succeeded, you can afford to be generous——"

"What do you want me to do? I will gladly undertake it. If you want to reward me for anything I may accomplish—let us realize that friendship."

She had risen and he stood in front of her holding out his hand. She took it and her eyes clouded.

"I do not know what may be done," she said. "I wanted your advice, if you believed, if you trusted me."

"With all my heart," he answered. It was a trite phrase and he uttered it somewhat glibly but he confirmed its meaning with a look.

"Thank you." The word was sufficient.

"But your brother had casts of the seven petals," said Keeler. "And you say he had secured translations. He had the eighth petal in his possession for several hours. Was he unable to translate its script? Why did he not take a cast of it like the rest?"

"It was too encrusted. All the rest were treated with weak acids for some time before the characters could be properly distinguished. It had to be done slowly and carefully as many of them were intricate. We did not have the necessary solvents in the house and in the meantime he carried

Digitized by Google

it with him. We thought we would be quite safe in Hoosac Falls. We knew we were followed.

I recognized Redding in the second machine. And I saw the taxicab though I did not know you were in it. No one in New York knew about the farm and we were sure we had shaken off Redding. In fact we saw him give up the chase. Richard had gone to the spring to get some water—it was analytically pure—in which to steep the herbs. Then—you came."

"Mounted upon a motor-cycle and desperately afraid of falling off," said Keeler.

"Now, then, I will go up with you to see your brother. I have an appointment with McVea tomorrow. Of course this magic draft of life is ridiculous. Exactly how to convince McVea of it, I do not know. The making of the formula may not be satisfactory. There may be tests. McAdie is to be there. I will consult him.

"But in any event I shall talk with McVea. There shall be some sort of restitution that will satisfy your brother. For the present my talk with him may get him into a better condition. It is the best I can do. The whole thing is so extraordinary—I mean the delusion as to the virtues of the talisman. It is an Oriental attribute to cling to superstitions that they will not put to the proof and both McVea and your brother have become affected with such a phase."

"I wish the priests had secured the thing," said the girl.

"I don't. I needed that fifty thousand. You see I am part Scotch myself, Miss Arden. What they want is to prevent the passing of the secret to Occidentals. I don't think they would have particularly bothered McVea while he had only some of the petals or did not guess what they are supposed to be able to accomplish. There are many of the flowers in existence in China and Tibet, I imagine. Several at any rate in the possession of the lamas.

"Cathay sleeps content on its secrets but they will fight to hold them. The petals of Lao-Tze are part of the crown jewels of a royalty blended with priestly and temporal rule. They belong to the mysterious East, a treasure of that storehouse which we Caucasians are bent upon rifling—and we must take the risks. Now take me up to Richard."

CHAPTER XVII

THE ELIXIR

KEELER visited McVea early, hoping to be there before McAdie. He had yet no definite plans to force the hand of the scientist but he meant to do the best he could. If, in some way, the elixir did not materialize—he supposed that it would have to assume a certain shape prescribed by the formula—and, if McVea utterly refused restitution, he resolved to make it himself out of the money he had received and cheerfully purchase with it the friendship of the girl.

But he had to be guided by circumstances and he trusted to his wits for the necessary diplomacy. The two guards were in the outer office and he told of his appointment. One of them consulted a memorandum tablet, then looked at his watch.

"Keeler or McAdie, after one o'clock," he read. "No one else to be admitted."

"It wants ten minutes of the time yet, you'll have to wait," he went on. "He's been busy all night. Jim and me split watches. Seemed to be powerful afraid of some one getting in to him. We ain't even seen him this morning. He wouldn't take in his breakfast. Something went off with a bang at ten o'clock but he cussed our heads off when we spoke to him."

The man waited until the exact hour before he knocked on the inner door. An inarticulate growl answered him.

"One o'clock, Mr. McVea, and here's Mr. Keeler to see you on appointment."

McVea flung the door open. He was clad in a brocaded dressing-gown of Oriental texture and design. His face was aflame with an excitement that culminated in his eyes, sparkling like diamonds under the shaggy brows.

"Come in, lad, come in," he cried, shutting the door behind them.

The air was aromatic with pungent essences, the table crowded with retorts, beakers, crucibles, graduates and racks of test-tubes filled with liquids and corked with wads of cotton. The floor was littered with the husks of bulbs and shreds of dried leafage. Above an alcohol lamp something was brewing in an earthenware receptacle, giving out a redolent vapor, curiously invigorating.

Digitized by Google

McVea pointed to a tall goblet of thin crystal, slightly steaming.

"Things took longer than I anticipated," he said. "But there were certain reagents that were difficult to establish. Now I am but waiting for the elixir to cool. Look at it, boy." He lifted the goblet in his long fingers and held it to the light. "Perfect, the hue of living blood, the essence of life itself, no sediment, no scum. Not even filtered, absolutely adjusted by the chemistry of its constituents."

"McAdie can not be here until later," he said. "He has a consultation. We shall not wait for him. Sit down until it cools. I have already taken the first draft, for there are two mixtures, and life is rioting through my veins now. Do ye ken what it means, man, yon essence of eternity? Power born of the past and present, the real ichor, a draft of divinity, a goblet of godhood!"

Keeler glanced past the glass with its rich transparent contents, shining in the sun like the heart of a ruby. In the museum beyond the lights were on. The case containing the petals was on a central table amid note-books and sheets of paper. The shutters were tightly closed, with the bars beyond them hidden. The safe was open. The scientist followed his look.

"I shall put the talisman in safe keeping," he said. "I shall need it no more. One dose suffices. But I shall hide the petals safely and destroy my formulas. McAdie but gave me the hints, ye ken. I read the runes. The secret is mine—mine. If I had but your youth?"

He looked suddenly at Keeler and the latter smiled back at him. He read mania in McVea's gaze, mania and a sudden suspicion.

"I would not change places with you," he said. "I am satisfied with an equal share of life with my friends."

"It would do you no good, mind ye," said McVea. "For there are two drafts to be taken and the first has gone to the last drop. Not that I mistrust ye. Ye ha' proved my trust and ye ha' been paid, ye ha'——"

He stopped abruptly. The goblet had stopped steaming. McVea took it in his hand.

"I drink to Life," he said, and swallowed the potion, tilting the vessel till the last bright globule, like a bead of blood, flowed into his lips. For a moment his eyes blazed and his face grew radiant. Some supernal activity seemed emanating from it. His form straightened until it towered erect.

"I hold——"

A fearful change swept over him with incredible rapidity. The features shrank convulsed with agony. Still upright, his body quivered in one complete convulsion. His jaws sagged and his tongue lolled out like a panting dog's. His eyes were horribly dilated, fearful, the whites suffused with sudden blood. The soul of the man seemed to be breaking its way through his tissues. Before Keeler could reach him he had crumpled as if his bones had suddenly become dissolved. Only the rind of a man quivered for a second at Keeler's feet.

He jumped for the door and threw it wide.

"Get a doctor," he shouted. The men stared for a second. Keeler repeated his order. "He has poisoned himself. Get a doctor."

One of the guards looked through the door, apparently dazed. The other rushed to the outer door.

"I'll have one here in a minute," he said. "There's one in the building."

Keeler felt the action was idle. McVea was dead beyond recall, as dead as if the mixture had acted inversely and thrust him back into the centuries. He searched the telephone directory for McAdie's number. The professor might be able to tell the names of the herbs, the doctor might know their properties and prescribe an antidote. As he called the number he knew that it was useless, but he got the connection as the guard came back with a man who entered swiftly, carrying a small surgeon's bag, and passed to the inner room.

McAdie promised to come immediately.

"I suspected something of the sort," he said. "McVea tried to hide his secret as well as he could but I knew he was going to tackle some experiment. I begged him to have any mixture analyzed before testing but he seemed to think I was trying to pump him. Poor devil. I'll be there in ten minutes."

As Keeler hung up the phone the doctor came out swiftly without his bag. Keeler called to him but he did not answer.

"Gone to get some dope from his room," said the guard.

Digitized by Google

The action was peculiar. Keeler had caught the barest glimpses of the physician but a vague suspicion mounted.

"Go after him and bring him back," he said. "Bring him back whatever he says."

The guard hurried away and Keeler went into the room where the body of McVea now sprawled in a chair by the window, his face ghastly, looking as if a weird mold had sprouted on the skin. His coat, vest and shirt had been unfastened. The door to the museum was open. The doctor's bag was on the table but the jewel case with the talisman was gone. Keeler returned swiftly to the office as the guard came back panting.

"Couldn't catch him, sir. He took the elevator to the hall and went out. Told the hallman he was going to the drug-store."

"What was his name?"

"Dr. Lenz. Lived in the suite just below this. Didn't have much practise, the elevator boy says. Only come here two months ago, just after he"—he jerked his head at the inner room—moved in."

"What did he look like? Anything like a Chinaman?"

The man looked perplexed.

"Now you come to mention it, yes and no. Kind of sallow and slanty eyes. Only they was hazel, not black."

"Tell the office to call the nearest physician," said Keeler curtly. The thing was plain enough. The Southern tribes of Tibet have less distinguishing racial features than many Mongols, and their eyes are hazel. The man had been living for two months in McVea's fortress waiting for the chance that had come at last. The talisman had gone back to its owners. And its ravisher had gone back to the dust.

The guard came back with McAdie.

"Doctor Bennington will be here in a minute or two," said the man. Was the other guy a crook?"

"Hardly that," said Keeler.

He passed in with McAdie.

The physician can not bring back—that," he said. "I thought you might know the nature of the herbs or be able to describe them but it is too late. He was going to destroy his formulas but they have destroyed him.

"He knew enough of Sanscrit to choose the recurring root-forms," said McAdie, "and he made careful drawings of those to show to me. I never handled the actual petals, but he had special difficulty with some words and I was able to get a fair idea of what he was up to. I have heard of Lao-Tze's elixir of life, of course. I never dreamed he would do more than experiment judiciously for the scientific research of the matter. I wish I could have seen the complete flower.

"It was Lao-Tze who said 'Death is the portal to the House of Life.' Whatever merit there may have been in the thing, the ingredients were undoubtedly powerful and only to be taken after a long course of physical and mental preparation. He did not take that into consideration."

Doctor Bennington entered and made a perfunctory examination.

"The man's tissues have been literally burned up," he said. "He must have had hardening of the arteries. The man spoke of poison. Do you suspect suicide?"

"An experiment that proved fatal," said McAdie tendering his card.

The physician bowed.

"I recognize the name," he said.

He sniffed at the contents of the various receptacles and shrugged his shoulders.

"An autopsy might reveal causes," he said. "But I can give a prognosis. He died of overstimulation—too potent tonic. With those arteries! A case of putting new wine into old bottles, gentlemen."

"LAST time of asking, Keeler," said Walton. "Are you coming with me to Borneo and am I going with you to Burmah afterward?"

"I think I have had enough excitement for a while," answered Keeler. "The United States looks good to me. I've about decided to stay and go in for breeding horses. I want to work out a theory about a mixture of one-tenth Arabian and the rest Morgan with a small percentage——"

"A small percentage of rot," retorted Walton. "But I can give you a tip, Keeler. We weren't there very long, but it looked to me as if there was a fine pasture land back of Sweetbrier Lodge. Hoosac Falls is a pretty little place. But, when you get tired of it and hear the East a-calling—*Gare la femme*, my boy. Better come to Borneo."

"I am not going to Borneo, thank you," answered Keeler. "As for you, you may go to the devil."

Digitized by Google

General Grant's Cigar

by James Francis Dwyer

Author of "The White Queen of Sandakan," "The Bridging of Malbert Swamp," etc.

NOW and then in the sweet backwaters of our country life we discover a love-idyl of infinite charm. We find that a youth and a maiden have drifted slowly together through the Springtime of their lives, and that love has come so gently into the hearts of the two that they are utterly unable to tell how, when or where the little god forced an entrance. Such a love-idyl took place in Galloping Dick Valley.

The sweethearts were Howard Frazer and Marjorie Ashworth, and the threads of their lives had been, from earliest infancy, woven together in the loom of everyday happenings. Howard, looking back over his life, could not discover a day that had not received a certain glamour from the near presence of the little maid, while Marjorie's mental records were filled with snapshots of Howard, the very, very earliest of which, a little blurred and a little indistinct, showed a barefooted boy who hunted tadpoles and everlastingly whistled "Dixie."

She remembered how his whistling had brought to her the first great puzzle of her life. She had asked the barefooted boy why he whistled the one tune and he had answered quickly—

"To get your grandfather mad."

"But that won't make grandfather angry!" cried Marjorie.

"Yes it will!" shouted the tadpole-hunter. "It's 'Dixie' that I'm whistlin' an' my granddad says Grandfather Ashworth doesn't like it."

The boy's remark puzzled Marjorie for long, long weeks, then she gradually came to understand that her grandfather and Howard's grandfather held different opinions. She became the companion of the tadpole-hunter, and Galloping Dick Valley was a place of wonders to her. The two spent their days together, long beautiful days that brought them much happiness.

The valley was an ideal place for youthful sweethearts. The slopes of Hymettus or the scented vales of Thessaly were backgrounds no whit more suitable for a love-setting. The birds that sang in the trees had notes as sweet as the bulbul that charmed the heart of the Princess Hamara and the little hares that came out in the late afternoons discreetly dropped their ears lest they should hear the words that lovers whispered.

The Frazer and Ashworth homes were on opposite sides of Galloping Dick Valley, separated by grassy slopes and the little river that gurgled over its bed of white pebbles. The Frazer house was on the western slope, and its diamond-shaped window-panes flirted wildly with the morning sun when he peeped up over Ironface Mountain. The windows of the Ashworth house faced the west and they heliographed good night to the red orb as he dropped into the green mattress of Pinker's Woods.

And in the valley love came through

Digitized by Google

soft sunny years that made it a place of amazing wonder to the two sweethearts. The song of the river, the perfume of the flowers, and the caresses of the little scented breezes that came down from Ironface Mountain brought into their lives a poetry that lifted them to the stars.

Wonderful, wonderful adventures came to the boy and the girl on the banks of the singing river. There was magic in Galloping Dick Valley. Looking back over the rose-hued years they saw days that humped themselves up like little Himalayas in the terrain of child life. There were many of those days. There was one, far, far back when a gipsy sat on the bridge of white sandstone and sang strange songs to the river.

There was the day when Howard agreed not to whistle "Dixie" if Marjorie would kiss him, which Marjorie immediately did, and there was the exciting day when Howard was lost in the woods that led up toward Ironface, a ramp of green thrust up against the dark red rock of the mountain. Thrilling, thrilling days.

In the Frazer and Ashworth households death had, in a freakish manner, cut away an entire generation, leaving on one side of the valley a solitary grandparent to Howard, and on the opposite side a single forerunner to pretty Marjorie. Howard's grandfather was known in Galloping Dick Valley as "Old Judge Frazer."

He was a white-haired, erect and rather dandified old man who had a habit of informing all and sundry that he was born on the day that General Zachary Taylor won the battle of Palo Alto and then, after giving this information, he looked closely at the person addressed to see if he or she was sufficiently acquainted with American history to know that Palo Alto was fought in the year 1846. Old Judge Frazer was a little formal, a little fussy. He spoke of "blood" and "old families" and he worshiped the memory of Robert Edward Lee. He never spoke of his hero as Robert E. Lee.

Across the valley was Grandfather Ashworth, twenty-five years older than Judge Frazer, and of a totally different type. Grandfather Ashworth was a stooped, garrulous old man who loved to sit in the sunshine and talk, and he was known to every man and woman in Galloping Dick Valley as the possessor of a relic that had no counterpart in the United States. This story tells how Grandfather Ashworth's relic had such a strange influence in the love-affairs of his granddaughter and Howard Frazer.

IT WAS on the day following the one on which Howard had given his promise that he would not whistle "Dixie" that the boy saw the relic for the first time and heard from the lips of Grandfather Ashworth the story of how it came into the old man's possession. Howard knew that he would never forget that day. It was the Everest of those humped days when happenings, tinted and beautiful, dropped into the waking hours and made lilac-colored pinnacles that reached to the stars. He sat above the singing river, holding Marjorie's hand, and Grandfather Ashworth told the story in a quaint, childlike manner that thrilled the boy.

"It was the sixth of June in 1862," began Grandfather Ashworth, who from much practise told his story with the charm and sweetness of a troubadour. "The sixth of June at about seven o'clock in the mornin'. I was jest after feedin' the hosses an' I was comin' up from the barn when I turned my head an' looked up the valley.

"What would you think, Howard, if you looked up this here valley on a nice Summer mornin' an' saw the banks of the river movin'? Yes, sir, movin'! Movin' slowly from that big pine to way up above Fowler's Crossin'!

" 'Jack Ashworth,' I says to myself, 'you're dreamin'! Your eyes have gone back on you an' you not much over forty.' That's what I said.

"Well, Howard, I rubbed my eyes an' looked again. An' the sides of the valley were movin' more than ever! Movin' fast, boy! An' d'ye know why? I'll tell you! Down Gallopin' Dick Valley was comin' an army! An army, Howard! Hoss an' foot an' cannon, five thousand an' more, an' I stood right there near the maple-tree an' watched 'em comin'. Sixth of June, 1862! Don't forget the date!"

Wonderfully thrilled was Howard Frazer as he listened. He held Marjorie's little hand in a tight clasp and his blue eyes shone brightly.

"Hoss an' foot an' cannon," repeated Grandfather Ashworth, pleased with the phrase. "They shook the earth. Prancin' hosses, companies an' companies of men,

Digitized by Google

an' reg'lar big black cannon that could knock a town clean off the map!

"A chap on a bay hoss jumped clean over my fence, frightenin' the ducks an' the chickens an' he yelled out a question at me as he came over. 'Is Pinker's Woods this side of the main road?' he cried. 'Yes, sir,' I said. 'Pinker's Woods is about six miles straight down the valley'.

"He swung his hoss round, jumped back over the fence an' galloped over to another officer sittin' on a big black hoss. He spoke to the chap on the black, then a bugle rang out an' the whole bunch stopped. Hoss an' foot an' cannon. They were right here then, swarmin' all roun' here where you're sittin'. An' I was talkin' to 'em, givin' 'em milk an' things."

"Northerners?" questioned Howard.

"Of course they were Northerners!" cried Grandfather Ashworth. "What 'd I be doin' givin' milk an' apples an' taters to rebels? Your grandfather was that kind, Howard, but not me! Old jedge went the other way to me an' he hasn't got roun' to the right way o' thinkin' yet."

Howard moistened his lips and remained silent. He wanted to stand up for his grandfather but the craving to hear the wonder-story swamped family loyalty, and Grandfather Ashworth continued.

"The chap on the big black hoss gave an order an' an officer with fifty cavalrymen started at a gallop down the valley.

" 'Where are they goin'?' I said to a feller I was givin' hot coffee to.

" 'The rebs are in Pinker's Woods,' he said, 'an' the cavalry is goin' to feel 'em out.'

"Say, young Howard, I thought those cavalrymen would break their necks they were in such a hurry. Zowie, didn't they ride! They went plumb down the slope into the river, clumb out near the old windmill an' went helter-skelter down the valley.

"I guess they were gone about half an hour when we heard firin'. Sounded like a boy beatin' a tin pan a long, long way off. Then after a while those troopers came back. Not all of 'em, Howard. Not half of 'em. Fifty men an' fifty hosses went down the valley an' only sixteen of 'em came back! Sixteen! Counted 'em myself as they came lickety-split up the road by Colcher's Mill!"

"What happened to the others?" asked Howard breathlessly.

"What happened to 'em?" cried Grandfather Ashworth. "Why, they were shot, boy! Shot by the rebs in Pinker's Woods! Shot by men they couldn't see! Didn't the old jedge ever tell you about Pinker's Woods, Howard?"

"No, sir," answered Howard, blushing under the scrutiny of Grandfather Ashworth's bright black eyes.

"That's a wonder," muttered the story-teller. "Curious."

He paused a moment as if seeking a reason for Old Judge Frazer's silence, then he went on with his story.

"The officer on the big black hoss cussed a treat when the cavalry leader told him what had happened. He jest said things about those rebels that would have frizzled 'em up if they'd been close enough to hear him. You bet!

"I got over close to where he was sittin' on his black hoss an' I says to one of the soldiers, 'Say, that chap can use some tall language.'

" 'What chap?' says the soldier.

" 'The chap on the black hoss,' I said.

" 'Why,' says the soldier, 'don't you know who that is?'

" 'No,' I said.

" 'He's General Grant,' he says.

" 'General Grant!' I yelled. *'General Grant!'*

"Say, Howard, I yelled that name out so loud that the general thought I was callin' out to him. He turned in his saddle an' looked at me, an' he didn't look as if he liked me either. No, sir! His cigar stuck up out o' the corner o' his mouth like as if he was tryin' to light it with the sparks that came out o' his eyes an' he looked at me as if I was a copperhead.

" 'Well,' he said, glarin' at me, 'do you know another way?'

" 'Another way where?' I said.

" 'Down the valley, you idjut!' he roared. 'The rebels have got into Pinker's Woods an' they're blockin' our way! Is there another road?'

"That gave me a chance, then, Howard. Gave me a chance to serve General Grant an' serve my country. Yes, boy. At that time there was only two men in this valley who knew Gallopin' Dick's trail round Ironface Mountain an' I was one of them. The other was your grandaddy, the jedge. That trail went round the mountain an' came out back of the woods.

Digitized by Google

" 'Why, yes, General,' I said, an' standin' right up in front of the black hoss I told him all about the trail.

" 'Can you guide a company over the mountain?" said the general.

" 'If I get a hoss I can,' I said back to him. 'I'm crippled with the rheumatism, General, else I'd have been out with the Army.'

"Well, they got me a hoss, Howard, an' I started out with an' officer an' a hundred cavalrymen. 'Get behind 'em an' root 'em out into the valley,' said General Grant to the officer as we rode off, 'I'll be waitin' for 'em when you get 'em into the open.'

"The officer saluted an' away we went up Gallopin' Dick's trail. When you get to be a man, Howard, you might take a trip over that trail. Gallopin' Dick used to ride down it at a gallop, so they say, but I don't believe it. A man would have to be plumb crazy to ride down that trail at a gallop. It's the worst trail between here an' the Mississippi, a reg'lar snorter of a track.

"Sometimes you're ridin' along a ledge 'bout three feet wide with a drop underneath of about a hundred yards or more an' other times you'd think the mountain was goin' to tilt clean over an' bury yer. It made that officer an' the cavalrymen sweat. You bet it did! You could hear 'em sayin' things about the trail an' about Gallopin' Dick as we went up it, an' they weren't praisin' either of 'em.

" 'How did this Gallopin' Dick die?' said the officer to me when we were half way over.

" 'He got hanged,' I said.

" 'He deserved it,' he snapped. 'They oughter burned him.'

"We got over the mountain by about noon an' then we crept quietly up on Pinker's Woods. Very quietly, young feller. Those rebs were watchin' the valley an' we were crawlin' in behind 'em an' they didn't know it. The whole bunch o' us had got off our hosses an' we were movin' through the trees like red Injuns.

"Presently some one in front fired slap-bang at us, then the officer yelled out, 'Charge,' an' the boys charged. I jest went along with 'em, hallooin' an' yellin' so as to make the rebs believe that the whole of Grant's army had got in behind 'em, an' I believe those rebs were so surprised that they jest thought ten thousand men were streakin' through the woods.

"They cut like all creation for the valley an' General Grant was waitin' for 'em as he said he would be. He was waitin' for 'em, young feller, an' when I got out on to the road there was a whole bunch of 'em with their hands up an' your grandaddy was 'mongst 'em! Yes, Howard. That was a time when Old Jedge Frazer forgot that there was some one who knew as much as he did.

"General Grant was sittin' on his black hoss like as if nothin' had happened an' when he saw me he nodded friendly like.

" 'Well, Ashworth,' he said, 'you got my boys around all right.'

" 'Why, yes, General,' I said, tryin' to look as if I'd done nothin' to brag about. 'Why, yes.'

" 'I thank you, Ashworth,' said General Grant. 'You saved us a lot o' trouble. I'm glad you didn't join the Army. If you were away we wouldn't have found Gallopin' Dick's trail.'

"Those were jest the words he said to me, Howard, an' then jest as he was ridin' off he stuck his hand into his jacket an' pulled out this cigar! This cigar I got here in this pickle-bottle!"

It was then that Howard Frazer had his first peep at the relic that was without counterpart in the whole of the land. In the pickle-bottle that was hermetically sealed with brown paper and red wax was a long black cigar, that had sloughed away much of its outer covering through the long years that had elapsed since General Grant rode down Galloping Dick Valley.

"Here it is jest as the general gave it to me!" cried Grandfather Ashworth. "He handed it to me like I'd hand this piece of stick to you an' he says—

" 'I don't know whether it's a good cigar, Ashworth, but it's the best durned smoke they had in the last town we passed through!'

"That's what he said, Howard, an' that's the whole story."

THAT same evening, Howard Frazer, sitting opposite his grandfather at the supper-table, put a question to the old judge.

"Grandfather," said the boy, "did you really think an army was attacking you in the rear on the day you were taken prisoner at Pinker's Woods?"

Digitized by Google

Old Judge Frazer laid down his knife and fork and turned his keen eyes upon his grandson.

"Has Grandfather Ashworth been telling you that story?" he snapped.

"Yes, sir," answered Howard. "He showed me the cigar General Grant gave him and he told me how he led the Northern cavalry over Galloping Dick's trail."

"Howard," said the old judge, after a long pause, "Grandfather Ashworth is mighty old and he's been showing that pickle-bottle with a stogie inside it up and down this valley for half a century, but some day some one's going to get mad and break that bottle! You mark my words! They'll get mad and break it, and that old stogie, being as dry as ashes, will float away on the wind!"

"Yes, sir," said Howard, and as the boy noted the little flush of anger upon the cheeks of the judge he wisely refrained from any further conversation regarding the doings in Pinker's Woods on that bright June morning of long ago.

But in the days that followed the telling of the story Galloping Dick Valley became more wonderful than ever to Howard Frazer. On sweet Summer days when a blue haze like a bridal veil hung over the river, he fancied he could see Grant's cavalry leaping down the grassy slopes into the river and once he was awakened from a midday siesta by the notes of a dream bugle that seemed to float down from Iron-face Mountain over which Grandfather Ashworth had led the troopers.

And then on one riotous Spring day the miracle of love was made plain to Howard Frazer and Marjorie Ashworth. The river, Spring-fattened by showers, climbed little by little till it flowed inch deep over the sandstone bridge. Marjorie, on the Frazer side of the stream, looked fearfully at the adventurous little waves, then, before she realized what was happening, strong arms picked her up bodily and carried her across.

The boy and the girl looked at each other with strange, startled eyes. A curtain that had obscured their vision had been suddenly torn aside and they were a little afraid, a little terrified at what they saw.

"Marjorie!" cried Howard. "Marjorie!"

The beautiful eyes of the girl looked up into the eyes of her boy sweetheart as he leaned toward her, then with a startled cry she turned and fled up the path that led to her grandfather's house.

WONDERFUL, wonderful days were those that came to Galloping Dick Valley after that happening. The lilac banner of love fluttered upon the little breezes that rolled down the valley, the tree fairies that wove the shawls for the woods made the green coverings more beautiful in honor of the lovers.

Summer bloomed into its full passion time and Galloping Dick Valley roused itself. Old Judge Frazer was busy. Very, very busy. The judge planned an Independence Day celebration and a real senator, a friend of the judge, was coming down to the valley to make an address. Old men chatted about the event, farmers from the hills and the fat lands where the valley widened discussed the big event at the crossroads.

The senator came, a large pompous man who was perfectly well aware that he was the main attraction of the day. He was under the personal guidance of Old Judge Frazer, but during the momentary absence of the judge, a mischievous person introduced the great man to Grandfather Ashworth, explaining that Grandfather Ashworth was the oldest man in Galloping Dick Valley.

To back up the statement Grandfather Ashworth dragged a few incidents from the reticule of his mind and hurled them at the senator.

"Old?" he cackled. "Why I was old when I saw Grant's cavalry come gallopin' back along this road from Pinker's Woods. Only sixteen of 'em came back out of half a hundred! Sixteen! Counted 'em myself!"

The senator was interested. He sat down beside Grandfather Ashworth, and the old man told the story of General Grant's invasion of Galloping Dick Valley, of the ride over the mountain and the attack upon the rebels in Pinker's Woods. A great story for the senator. His face expressed his astonishment as Grandfather Ashworth told of the cigar and how he had preserved it through the years.

"And you have now the cigar that General Grant gave you?" cried the amazed legislator.

"Sure," said Grandfather Ashworth. "I

Digitized by Google

put it in a pickle-bottle an' sealed it up the day the general gave it to me. It looks pretty near the same now. A little bit raggedy an' dry, but it's there."

"I'm amazed!" cried the senator. "Could I see it?"

"Sure," said grandfather. "My house is jest down the road an' I'll send my granddaughter to get the bottle."

So Marjorie went for the pickle-bottle, and with Marjorie went Howard Frazer. Life was good to them on that wonder morning. Galloping Dick Valley was a beautiful, sweet place, and they loved with the deliciously thrilling love of youth.

The senator took the pickle-bottle from the trembling hands of Grandfather Ashworth and stared at the frayed cigar.

"Extraordinary!" he cried. "Most extraordinary! I never heard of such an amazing relic! Never!"

And then the senator, knowing nothing of Old Judge Frazer's part in the affair at Pinker's Woods on that June morning in 1862, carried the bottle to the judge.

"This should be in Washington!" he cried. "It should! A cigar given by our greatest general as a reward for a brave deed should be placed——"

"That cigar makes me tired!" interrupted Old Judge Frazer. "Why—why—what did he bring it here for today? I'm sick of hearing about that cigar!"

"Course you are!" screamed Grandfather Ashworth. "Course you are! General Grant gave it to me 'cause I led his men in behind a bunch of Johnny Rebs, an' you was one of 'em! You saw General Grant give it to me, didn't yer? You were there with yer hands up in the air an'——"

Old Judge Frazer sprang from his chair and made a rush at Grandfather Ashworth and it took the combined efforts of the senator and six committeemen to keep the two old warriors apart. Their shrill, high-pitched voices screamed threats and challenges and Galloping Dick Valley divided itself into two sections and followed the old men as good friends led them to their respective homes, Grandfather Ashworth nursing the pickle-bottle, Old Judge Frazer nursing his wounded pride.

To Marjorie and Howard the row between the two old men was a tragic affair. Grandfather Ashworth, on reaching home, had called his granddaughter into the parlor and addressed her sternly.

"I don't want you to have anything more to do with that young Howard Frazer!" he screamed.

"Grandfather!" cried Marjorie.

"You can yell 'Grandfather' as much as you like!" snapped the old man. "What I says is the law in this house! His family is never goin' to get mixed up with mine. No sirree! The jedge is pizen, plain pizen! Saw it in his eyes when the senator showed him the pickle-bottle!"

Across the valley, at the same moment, Old Judge Frazer was addressing his grandson.

"Howard," said the judge, "you've got to leave off playing the fool with that young Ashworth girl.

"Grandad!" cried Howard. "Why, Marjorie and I—why—why we—we love each other!"

"You heard what I said!" roared the judge. "I don't want you to see her or to talk to her! If you do you'll have to leave this house!"

The sunshine left Galloping Dick Valley. The little breezes lost their caressing softness. The river sang no more as it hurried down to the big bridge far below Pinker's Woods. At least it seemed so to the two lovers. Others might have felt the sunshine and the breezes and heard the music of the river, but Howard and Marjorie felt certain that the valley had become a place of intense gloom.

They could not rebel against the ukase. At least Marjorie could not. Grandfather Ashworth was ninety-five years of age and she had not the heart to disobey him. She met Howard and told him this and Howard became despondent.

And as the days rolled on there came new troubles to vex Howard. The senator had carried the story of General Grant's cigar northward and down into Galloping Dick Valley came a young man who desired to see the relic. He saw the cigar and also saw Marjorie Ashworth, and he stayed.

Howard hated him. The newcomer was a swaggering young man, much in love with himself, a boastful talker, a little inclined to patronize the dwellers in the valley. But Howard's dislike was mostly based on the knowledge that the visitor, whose name was Franklin Ayer, went daily to the Ashworth house, ostensibly to hear again the story of how Grandfather Ashworth led the Northern cavalry over Galloping Dick's

Digitized by Google

trail, but in reality to see and talk with pretty Marjorie.

The residents of the valley watched and wondered. They loved Marjorie Ashworth, while Howard was a general favorite.

Lafe Blaine, who farmed at the back of Ironface Mountain, met Howard on the road one morning.

"Mornin', Howard," said Lafe.

"Morning, Lafe," said Howard.

Lafe pulled up his team and after the greeting he sat silent for a few moments, looking down at Howard.

At last he spoke.

"A pity your grandad an' Grandfather Ashworth had that row, Howard," he said.

"Yes, it was," agreed Howard.

Again there was a silence, then another remark from Lafe.

"Seems to me that this here feller Franklin Ayer wouldn't be stoppin' in the valley if they hadn't rowed," he said.

Howard made no comment and Lafe shook his reins and clucked to his horses. As he moved off he turned his head and spoke in a voice that showed he had little love for the visitor.

"I heard him say last night that he came from the place where my sister, Emma, is livin'. I'm goin' to write Emma an' find out about that chap."

Howard stood and watched the wagon go down the road, then he struck up through the trees toward Ironface. The Autumn had come quietly upon the valley and the trees were a riot of color.

He found Galloping Dick's trail and followed it, his thoughts upon Marjorie and her grandfather, of Lafe Blaine's words and of Franklin Ayer. Lafe's few remarks stayed in his mind like verbal pellets that refused to be digested. It was a pity that Old Judge Frazer and Grandfather Ashworth had quarreled. And of course Lafe had stated the truth when he said that the quarrel was responsible for the prolonged stay of Franklin Ayer in Galloping Dick Valley.

Howard thought over Lafe Blaine's parting remark.

Ayer came from the town where Lafe's sister Emma was living. He wondered if Emma knew of him. He wondered if Lafe would really write. As he plodded up the trail he wished that Lafe would write.

WEEKS passed and rumors went abroad in Galloping Dick Valley. There was a story that Franklin Ayer had offered Grandfather Ashworth a thousand dollars for General Grant's cigar. There was another story that the visitor had proposed to Marjorie and that she had accepted him. The valley was in doubt about the latter story although Franklin Ayer did not contradict it. When Tom Holcomb asked Ayer what he would do with the cigar, he replied—

"Present it to a museum; one treasure will be enough for me to look after."

One treasure? Tom Holcomb spread the story up and down the valley. The cigar would go to a museum, but the other treasure Ayer would keep! Howard Frazer heard the narrative late one afternoon and he went striding away up over Ironface, away back through the massed battalions of trees toward Lafe Blaine's place.

He had a foolish idea of never returning to Galloping Dick Valley. He would walk on and on, and in time he would forget the singing river, the Ashworth house and the white sandstone bridge over which he had carried Marjorie on the day that they discovered that love had stolen into their hearts!

On and on walked Howard. He crossed the shoulder of the mountain and struck back across the high plateau beyond. He walked in a daze. He thought of the old judge, of Grandfather Ashworth, of the quarrel, of the pompous senator, whose admiration for General Grant's cigar had brought about the row between the two old men. Howard hated the senator.

It came dusk. He was walking blindly onward without thinking. He was never going back to Galloping Dick Valley. Never!

Some one called his name and Howard halted, and looked around. He was near Lafe Blaine's place, and as the call came again he knew that it was Lafe Blaine who was calling him. In the soft dusk he saw the lanky farmer running forward.

"Why—why, Howard!" spluttered Lafe. "An' I was jest thinkin' o' you! Jest this minute. I said to myself 'I've got to see Howard Frazer right now,' an' next minute I looked up an' seen you walkin'. Where yer goin'?"

"Nowhere—anywhere," growled Howard, then after a moment's pause he cried:

Digitized by Google

"I'm going away from the valley! I'm not going back again!"

Lafe Blaine stood for a moment regarding the youth, then he pulled an envelope from the pocket of his coat and thrust it at Howard.

"You're goin' back!" he cried. "You're goin' back now! Read that, Howard. It's from my sister, Emma, who's livin' in the place that Franklin Ayer came from! Read it! Every word of it!"

Howard Frazer read with the note close to his face. It was getting dark up there on the plateau behind Ironface, but Emma Blaine wrote a large hand and he managed somehow.

When he had finished he turned upon Lafe Blaine and gripped his arm.

"Why did you say I had to go back at once?" he cried. "What—what do you know?"

"That chap was braggin' last night," said Lafe Blaine. "He ordered a buggy to take him to the train at seven this evening. Seven this evening, Howard! Jim Tuttle said he could run him down in the sulky, but he said that another person might be goin' with him so he wanted a bigger trap. He was goin' to catch the eight o'clock train and——"

Howard Frazer interrupted the farmer with a cry of rage.

"What's the shortest way back?" he cried. "Quick! Quick! Tell me!"

"Why," said Lafe Blaine, a little startled by the look upon the face of the youth. "The shortest way to the valley is to slip across through the wood till you strike Gallopin' Dick's trail, then go straight down. It's a rough road though and——"

But Howard Frazer had gone.

The youth found Galloping Dick's trail and started to run down it at a break-neck gait. He had to save Marjorie, Marjorie who was sweet and innocent and confiding, who had played with him through those long dream days of youth when they saw wonderful visions in the purple haze that hung above the valley.

Howard recalled Grandfather Ashworth's story as he rushed madly down the trail in the gathering night. He remembered what the old man had told him concerning the remarks which the cavalry officer and his men hurled at Galloping Dick and the trail which the galloper had made down Ironface Mountain. An eery road it was in the gloom.

At times Howard ran along narrow ledges above great black depths up from which came the sighing of the trees that envied the pines on the topmost ridges. Once he stumbled and narrowly saved himself from falling into one of these chasms.

The lights in the valley came into view—little flickering lights that beckoned him. He ran faster. A terror concerning Marjorie took possession of him and he forgot all dangers. He fell many times, but he picked himself up and ran on. He blessed Galloping Dick, Galloping Dick who had made a trail that helped General Grant save the Union and which was now helping him to save Marjorie!

He reached the slope at the bottom of the mountain, rushed along the road to the white sandstone bridge, crossed it, charged up the bank and hurled himself through the door into Grandfather Ashworth's house!

She was there! Marjorie! She was standing in the front room, dressed in her best clothes, her hat on her head, a little bag upon the floor at her feet. Beside her was Franklin Ayer!

For a moment the panting Howard stood without speaking, then he looked at his right hand. His fingers gripped Emma Blaine's letter in which Emma had answered the questions of Lafe the inquisitive.

Howard Frazer stepped toward Ayer and held out the crushed letter.

"This is from a girl who works in the street in which you live," he said quickly. "She says—let me see what she says—she says that your wife is ill and that——"

Howard Frazer received a blow that sent him backward. He heard Marjorie scream out. Ayer was attempting to force her to accompany him, but she clung to the great wooden rocker and called upon Howard to save her.

It was a great fight. The two young men sprang at each other, and, locked in a tight embrace, crashed up and down the room, smashing small articles of furniture that came in their way. Howard had a dim idea that Grandfather Ashworth had entered the room. He heard Marjorie, screaming out an explanation, then he caught a glimpse of Grandfather Ashworth hopping wildly around with stick uplifted endeavoring to get a clear blow at Franklin Ayer's head.

Grandfather Ashworth struck, but, alas,

Digitized by Google

it was not Ayer's head that the stick landed on. The pickle-bottle containing the cigar given to grandfather by General Grant stood high upon a shelf specially built for it, and the old man's descending stick crashed down upon it and smashed it into small pieces!

Grandfather Ashworth's cry of anguish made Howard release his grip upon Franklin Ayer, and Ayer seized the opportunity to dart through the door and out into the soft night that had settled down upon Galloping Dick Valley.

TWENTY minutes later Old Judge Frazer, passing the Ashworth home, heard the voice of his grandson, and, much indignant, he stepped to the door and called out his name.

"Howard!" cried the judge, "what did I tell you? What did—why, what has happened?"

Old Judge Frazer had heard the loud lamentations of Grandfather Ashworth, and had stepped in through the door to find the ancient on his knees, fingering a tiny pile of black ash while beside him endeavoring to comfort him were Howard and Marjorie.

Howard rose to his feet and explained.

"Grandfather Ashworth accidentally broke the bottle that held General Grant's cigar, sir," he said. "The cigar was so old that it crumbled into dust and—and he's upset."

Old Judge Frazer took a quick step forward and seized the thin shaking fingers that were touching the black dust of the cigar.

"My poor old friend!" he cried. "My dear old friend. I'm sorry! I'm very, very sorry! Why, sir, I'd sooner lose ten thousand dollars than have you lose that cigar. I'm dreadfully sorry."

Grandfather Ashworth stopped crying, and, with the help of the judge and Howard, got to his feet. Leaning on his stick he looked into the face of his neighbor, then he put out his hand to the judge and spoke in a half whisper.

"Judge, I've been a fool," he said slowly. "I've been tormentin' you with that cigar for fifty years an'—an' now you're sorry I lost it! Judge, I'm glad. It made you an' me enemies an' it kept young Howard an' Marjorie apart. An' it might have done more than that. I should have smoked it, Judge. Should have smoked it the mornin' General Grant gave it to me, then——"

He stopped and Old Judge Frazer led him to a chair. For a few moments he remained silent then he spoke again.

"It's not nice to keep up a fight after it's finished," he said. "It wasn't Grant's way. An' it wasn't Abe Lincoln's way."

There was another pause then Grandfather Ashworth continued.

"Howard," he said, "if you an' Marjorie would like to sit out on the piazzy an' talk, why the judge an' me will have a little drink an' a smoke together."

Through the open door little scented breezes came softly, carrying the sweet smells of the dying year, from far away came the faint scream of the engine that drew the eight o'clock express northward, the music of the river came through the still night and peace like a wonderful benediction fell upon Galloping Dick Valley.

PROVERBS

by RICHARD BUTLER GLAENZER

HUMOR hasn't any color. Hear the Black of Trinidad:
"Eggs should never dance with stones. Monkeys think that men are mad."
Wisdom comes of common sense. Hear the Black of Martinique:
"Sticks are never strong as swords. Sunday cannot last the week."
Humor draws no color-line; common sense, though rare, is sense:
If your whiteness can't enlighten, you are only doubly dense!

Wit inhabits every race. Hear the Chink of Kiangsu:
"Drums, the best, can't beat themselves. Junks to sail must have a crew."
Truth is born of common sense. Hear the Chink of Kiangsi:
"Fools fill up a well with snow. Tigers grin at charity."
Wit is not concerned with race; common sense, though rare, is sense:
If you're dull, your very whiteness only blazes the offense!

Digitized by Google

Out of the Wreck

by Captain A.E. Dingle

Author of "Blind Luck of St. Paul," "The Avenging Sea," etc.

A SEA FOG with wind, and intermittent flurries of snow; a deep, ancient, and ill-manned three-masted schooner charginglumberingly across the Northern steam lanes, spouting gray torrents from reeling scuppers to the grumbling clank of laboring pumps; a mate at odds with the skipper, and a skipper at odds with the world: thus the *Centurion*, mahogany laden from Africa, groping blindly toward Boston.

"There it is again!" snarled Captain Gedge, swinging around to the mate. "A steamer's whistle—and you can't hear it! What use are you, anyhow?"

"It's no steamer, sir," returned Mr. Howse, doggedly. "I hear it all right—it's the three blasts of a wind-jammer in succession—and it's at one-minute intervals, not two-minute. That quinine you're doping yourself with is making you deaf as an anchor, Captain Gedge."

Three blasts on a sailing-ship's fog-horn meant a ship running before the wind. So far as rule of the road went, the *Centurion* had right of way equally over such a vessel as over a steamer—if the running vessel gave it to her. The schooner's own wheezy hand-pump foghorn ground out two blasts to indicate that she was on the port tack, and eyes and ears strained through the murk of fog and snow and night to catch the reply from the unseen stranger.

With her three seamen to a watch, an only mate, and a single-handed cook-steward, the *Centurion* was poorly manned; with a skipper hard bitten by the money bug, and in whose veins flowed a mixture of mean blood and utter selfishness, her emergence from the tropics into the raw Northern Winter was a shivering nightmare to all hands—except Captain Gedge.

Long months of stewing on the blazing Gold Coast had thinned the blood and softened the endurance of unaccustomed seamen; fever had already diminished their number; the cook, a derelict from the Coast whose earlier life had obviously been cast in less unpleasant places, had never found his galley too hot even with a vertical sun at noon. And the money bug had bitten the skipper with such virulent effect that the ship's slop-chest had been emptied at the last moment to a trader ashore at five times the price his poorly paid crew could have paid him for the necessary comforts it contained.

And now, with swirling snow stinging the face, and dank fog saturating clear through to quaking bones, the scanty crew cursed the skipper for a stony-hearted Shylock. Each seaman's trick at the wheel was a horror to anticipate; the cook's thin face grew haggard and blue; his bloodless fingers clamped frigidly on to his dishes the moment he left the warmth of the stove. That alone saved him from a visitation of wrath for broken platters: his hands were too coldly stiff to drop them.

"Take the wheel, Mr. Howse, and send the helmsman for the steward," ordered the skipper, surlily. "I want some coffee."

Digitized by Google

"No need to haul that poor devil of a steward out of his bunk at midnight for coffee, sir," retorted the mate. "It's all ready in the galley. I'll get it myself."

"You do as I tell you!" returned Captain Gedge, with vicious emphasis. "By ——! Who's captain o' this vessel?"

Mr. Howse stepped over to the wheel with a shrug of his wide shoulders, and sent the seaman forward to the steward's bleak and coverless bunk. It was but the culmination of a series of petty cruelties on the part of the skipper; cruel not because of the orders given, but because the hardships of the crew might easily have been softened by a little common humanity.

The mate knew full well that only the nearness of the home port restrained the scanty crew from attempting reprisals in line with the threats he had heard; threats which his sense of right had impelled him to ignore in spite of his sense of duty.

The three blasts of the unseen ship to windward came down to the schooner again, much nearer now, and again the shivering seaman on the forecastle replied with the *Centurion's* two wheezy barks. Captain Gedge showed his uneasiness, for the direction of the sound indicated no change of course on the part of the stranger.

Then, up from the fog and sleet of the maindeck, stumbled the steward, scalding coffee slopping over from the mug gripped in his shaking hands. The fellow's teeth chattered with a chill that reached to his bones, and the shivering of his ill-clad body must have induced pity in any humane man. But Captain Gedge was not in that class. He snatched the hot beverage, and, as the steward turned in haste to run back to the poor shelter of his bed, snarled:

"Stay here! Wait for the mug, you white-livered rat!"

The helmsman resumed the wheel, having loitered forward for a whiff of his pipe, and the mate stepped up beside the skipper, placing himself to windward of the quaking steward with the kind intention of intercepting some of the night's bitterness. His nostrils sniffed longingly at the aroma of the hot coffee; all his other senses were keenly attuned to the confused sounds to windward. Somewhere behind the blinding curtain of fog and snow Fate foamed down with shearing stem.

That the skipper was rattled Mr. Howse more than suspected. In between noisy gulps of his coffee, Captain Gedge turned toward the wheel with a gesture which almost became an order to change the schooner's course. That alone, in a vessel having right of way, proved uneasiness.

Suddenly through the swishing of seas and the hollow snoring of wind in the canvas came a deeper, heavier sound—the unmistakable thunder of an outfalling bow-wave; in the same instant a shrill note high up told of running gear in a squealing sheave: and with the whole blared those three horn blasts, so close that one might imagine he felt the breath of them.

"Up hellum! Up with it!" shrieked Captain Gedge.

His coffee mug clattered on the deck, the warm fluid sluicing gratefully over the steward's numbed toes.

"Hold your course!" roared the mate, springing to the wheel to stay the catastrophe.

He had detected the sounds which told him the stranger had sensed the danger, and was altering her course to pass astern of the schooner. To obey the skipper's command meant to place the *Centurion* fair in the course of the oncoming ship. But, as he had said, the skipper's hearing had suffered from quinine, and those vital sounds had escaped him.

"Up hellum, I say! Hard up!" bellowed Gedge, joining the other two at the wheel.

The helmsman yielded to the confusion of clashing orders, and relinquished the spokes to his superiors. Mr. Howse, after one furious attempt to overcome the skipper's frenzied strength, left the wheel and hurried forward, sending the seaman in haste to rouse out all hands. The steward still shivered at the poop-rail.

"Get below, Steward, and scoop all the blankets and grub you can find," the mate told him. "This smells like a boat job to me, son. Get a move on now."

The three seamen of the watch below were out on deck in a twinkling. Men clothed as they were, whose clothes were their only bed-covering, slept lightly in such weather. Dumbly they peered aft and to windward, where as yet no definite menace appeared. The schooner fell off before the wind with a creaking of sheet-blocks and squeal of goose-neck as the skipper cast off the turns of the spanker-sheet and eased the after-pressure.

All the while in the ominous gloom

Digitized by Google

chirrupped the brace-blocks and parrels of the stranger; her bow-wave thundered nearer. Then a seaman of keen vision caught the blurr against the fog, and screamed:

"Here she comes! Look out, Cap'n, she's right aboard yuh!"

Towering high in air, fair over the *Centurion's* poop, the jibs of a great square-rigged ship soared up into the nothingness of the swirling mist. Her long jib-boom spiked across the poop and tore through the spanker; and like the Javelin of Wrath her spear-headed dolphin-striker smashed through the taffrail, made kindling of the wheel and binnacle, and flung Captain Gedge headlong the length of his after-deck.

The stranger was a steel ship of four times the wooden schooner's tonnage. The great steel stem crashed deep into the *Centurion's* stern, whirling the lighter craft broadside on to her own course by sheer weight; trimmed yards and sheets gave her added power; she tore loose from her victim, hurled her aside, and surged off into the night.

NO NEED to order out the solitary seaworthy boat. Even as the mate raised his head from the prostrate skipper to issue the command, the six scared seamen swarmed about gripes and cradle, clearing away the raffle of a voyage by the simple method of kicking overboard everything in the way. Mr. Howse bent over the skipper again, fearful of what he should find on close examination.

Captain Gedge lay crumpled up in hideous shape, his face set and white. One leg was doubled under him, and his teeth shone out of tightly withdrawn lips. The boat-falls sang to the pull of desperate men, and the boat hung over the rail. Then up ran the steward, laden with a nondescript burden and to him the seamen shouted:

"Come on, Doctor! Shake a leg! Tumble in wi' th' junk and bear a hand, onless yuh want's a swim!"

"Wait, wait for the captain and Mr. Howse," cried the steward.

Somehow in the crisis his shivering had ceased; he moved with surety across the streaming deck.

"Mr. Howse kin come if he likes; tuh —— wi' the skipper!" roared back a voice, and again the falls squealed through the blocks.

The boat dropped lower. A man saw the futility of lowering away with the schooner charging along before the wind in a lumpy sea, and the falls were belayed while hands hauled down the jibs and let go fore and main-halyards by the run. Then as the schooner swung up to the wind again, a hand hauled in the mizzen-sheet and righted the helm, leaving her to ride head-to-wind with a flat spanker to hold her.

"Comin,' Mister Howse?" a seaman called. His mates were vociferously arguing with him to waste no more time.

"Yes, boys, I'm with you," answered the mate, tugging at the prostrate skipper. "Give me a hand here; ain't going to leave a man like this, are you?"

"Yuh'll have tuh leave him or stay yerself!" came back the retort. "She ain't goin' to float much longer. She's mighty deep aft now. Comin'?"

The mate sprang to the rail, peering down into the boat tugging at the tackles with oars out all ready to cast off. The steward had jumped into the boat to stow the things he had brought up from the cabin, and now two men tried to prevent him climbing back on board.

"Come now, lads," urged Mr. Howse. "You won't feel very sweet afterward if you leave an injured man behind to drown. Lend a hand with the skipper. Do this for me."

There was a scuffle, and out of the swaying huddle of dim figures emerged the thin form of the steward, swarming up the after-fall in response to the appeal.

"Good lad, Doctor!" the mate said, clapping the volunteer heartily on the back. "We can manage to get him down, I guess. Come on."

He looked about for a line with which to lower Gedge's bulky form, calling all the while to the seamen to wait.

"Here, I'll drop the peak. Haul the gaff over with that vang, there; we'll ease him down on the end of the fall," he directed, running to the halyards and slacking away.

Then the skipper awoke to the situation, and cried querulously for news.

"All right, sir; we'll have you in the boat in a minute," the mate assured him. "Just hold on and lay quiet. Here, let me pass this line under your arms."

"What d'ye say? Boat?" queried Gedge, trying to see about him. "Is the schooner sinking then?"

Digitized by Google

"She's cut down to the keel aft, sir, and almost clear through to the mizzen-mast. But keep still. The boat's all ready."

And upon the skipper's ears smote the steward's husky cry—

"They've shoved off, sir—the boat's gone!"

As if in mockery, faintly, receding down the wind, came the three blasts of the foghorn from the ship that had stricken the *Centurion*.

"You let 'em get away with the boat, and leave me!" snarled the skipper, raising himself to glare around the dismal prospect. "You've done this on purpose, Howse! It wouldn't have happened only you hollered cross-orders to the wheel! Here I am—all mashed up—and you let 'em leave me! Help me to my bunk, you murderer!"

The man was incoherent, raving; and the mate could have done real murder gladly at that moment but for the restraining thought. He beckoned to the steward, and they stooped over Gedge.

"Don't waste breath cussing me, Captain," said Mr. Howse. "You ought to have held your course. As for the men quitting you, seems to me you've asked for that all the trip. Come on now; we'll put you in the galley while we see what's to be done. It's warm in there, and dry; your bunk, and the cabin is awash by now."

"Who's the other lunkhead, him carrying my feet?" queried the skipper as they bore him down the short poop ladder. "Why ain't he gone? Is he paralyzed?"

"Ain't no credit to you if he ain't," growled the mate. "It's the steward, as you hauled out of his bunk and kept shivering in the fog and snow for spite."

"Huh! That white-livered rat!" was the muttered comment, spat out between a groan of pain and a curse. "Go easy, you butcherin' grub-spoiler! D'ye think I'm built o' concrete?"

The galley was cozy enough, once the doors were shut, and the lockers made a convenient couch. They laid the injured man down, taking off his heavy pilot jacket and folding it for a pillow. The steward piled coal on the stove while Mr. Howse examined the skipper to ascertain his damages, the patient cursing both impartially meanwhile. Luckily the galley coal-bunker had been filled from the main stock in the 'tween-decks the evening before.

"Plenty of coal here, sir—enough for two or three days," remarked the steward, lingering over his job to allow the heat to soak into his chilled bones. At the moment it mattered nothing to him that the schooner rolled more soggily every minute; warmth was immediate life—Death might howl its fiercest outside.

"That's fine, Steward," replied the mate, rising from his examination. "Nothing much the matter here, except a bad bruise or two and a strained knee. The schooner'll float on the lumber in her for a while, though Lord knows how long her own old timbers can stand battering from inside and out too. Come on out, son, till we see what can be done about leaving her."

He opened the door and stood waiting for the steward. That ague-smitten individual started, shivered at the damp gray night outside, and tried to drag himself away from the stove. Mr. Howse was wholly sympathetic.

"That's right, too," he said, coming inside again. "It isn't fit for a dog to be outside in those rags."

He peered into the galley corners, then at the skipper. Captain Gedge lay on his side, his face ruddy now in the firelight, his great bulk the embodiment of well-fleshed bones and pulsing blood. And since the mate's announcement of the slight nature of his injuries, his eyes gleamed with a sort of devilish satisafaction that he could lie there in dry warmth while others toiled in the fog and sleet for his benefit.

"Here you are—hand me that potato sack," said the mate. The steward handed up a coarse burlap bag, part full of potatoes. "Now raise his head," the mate went on, doubling the loose part of the bag over the full bulge.

"Hey, what's your game?" snapped the skipper, knocking away the steward's hands as they raised his head.

"Keep quiet!" growled the mate, seizing Gedge by the hair. "You be as good as you can, or by Godfrey we'll quit you too!"

The heavy, warm pilot jacket was taken away, and the potato bag replaced it.

"There you are, Steward, clap that onto your back," said the mate; and as the steward's eyes flashed in half-amused appreciation of the kindly thought, Mr. Howse added: "Now take his boots and stockin's. He won't need them in here!"

In a torrent of oaths from the despoiled skipper the steward was snugly clad, and

Digitized by Google

he cheerfully followed the mate into the unpleasantness outside. The galley doors were shut, for there alone, so long as the schooner would float, was shelter and food for the laborers; and warmth must be conserved if coal was to last.

MORNING brought no sunshine; instead, a whistling wind and driving rain dispelled the fog and raised a tumble of sea that racked the stricken schooner to the keel. Her decks thundered to the surging balks of timber in the hold; early in the morning the planks gaped in a dozen places; bulwarks went by the fathom, leaving gaunt stanchions to add to her forlorn aspect.

The mate looked at the result of their labors with misgiving. His first procedure had been to hoist the peak of the spanker again, in order to keep the comparatively high bows to the rising sea. That alone had kept the schooner from being swept and shattered in the gray hours of dawn. In the waist, between hatch-coamings and shattered bulwarks, a mass of miscellaneous lumber, spars, and casks had been gathered, each piece held against mishap by ends of loose halyards and sheets.

The lanyards of the fore and main rigging on both sides had been cut, in hope that the masts would fall and give them more stout spars for their projected raft. But the stoutest part of that ancient schooner was her spars and their steps; roll she did—giddily, sickeningly—but the masts stood defiantly, unstayed.

"Better get some grub now, Steward," said Mr. Howse, shaking his head at a swooping sea that buried the poop.

It passed, taking with it the main cabin skylight and both poop-ladders.

He flung open the upper half of the galley door, and surprised Captain Gedge in the act of replacing the coffee-pot on the red-hot stove. The place was like an oven: a veritable snug harbor after the bleak hurly-burly of the decks; and there was little of the sick man in Gedge as he sat down on his locker with a sheepish grin. That grin heated the mate's blood; his hands twitched with the impulse to vent his bitter mood on the cause of their plight.

Yet, he considered, the skipper might really have made a tremendous effort to get that coffee. That was it! He could go on making such efforts: others were making efforts as tremendous in far less pleasant surroundings. The steward began to busy himself preparing food, and the mate stopped him.

"Leave that," he said. "We've got to hurry up with the raft if the sea's going to kick up any more. Get a mug o' coffee now, and"—he turned savagely to the skipper—"you're able to feed your own face, Cap'n, so you can feed us. I don't think you're man enough to do a man's part on deck; but you can rustle some grub for all hands."

"I'll see you both in —— first!" swore Gedge, starting to his feet with little appearance of disability.

"Easy now, easy," warned the mate, shoving him back. "I don't believe you're hurt at all—and you've skulked in the warm here while I and the man you called a white-livered rat have wrenched our soul-cases trying to save your miserable life. You just get busy and make some hot grub. You can call when it's ready by hammering on the door with something——"

He flung out a hand to stay the skipper's furious objection.

"Oh yes you will! I'm going to fasten the doors outside, and they won't be opened until breakfast is ready. If there's no grub ready when the raft's finished—you stay here, and I mean it!"

A half hour of labor went toward the assembling of the raft materials, interrupted at swiftly lessening intervals by the boarding seas which all but undid the work. Then a clamor inside the galley reached the mate's ears above the racket of crashing timbers, and he seized the steward's arm.

"Come on, son; time to eat," he bawled.

The steward followed, stumbling blindly in the mate's wake, and reached the half-open galley door with a tottering rush.

"Hey, stand up, lad!" cried Mr. Howse, bracing himself as the steward crashed into him. "What's the matter? You hurt?"

The hardships of the voyage, the bitter chill of the past night, and the recent stupendous toil had sapped the steward's failing strength, and now, on the threshold of warmth and rest he collapsed utterly. The mate snatched a steaming mug of coffee from the skipper's hand, and forced a few drops through the steward's blue lips. Then he pushed Gedge aside and laid the unconscious man on the lockers.

"Now you see how white-livered he is!" said Howse, intensely. "He's worked

Digitized by Google

himself out for you—and God knows why. Now it's work or sink for yours, Gedge, and you'd better say work. I won't sink, or let the doctor sink, so long as there's a spar left to float us; but I'll leave you like a dog if you skulk. Where's the grub? Come out with it."

"There's nothing here but coffee and hard-tack," retorted the skipper, defiantly.

He had the appearance of a man who had fed on better fare, and the mate's keen nose refused to be satisfied that the barge of biscuit on top of the coal-bunker could add the savour to coffee as he sniffed it.

"Help yourself," said Gedge. "There's the bread—and you'd better remember who's skipper of this ship."

"I'll take my chance about the skipper part, if we ever make shore, and as for the grub, you're a dirty liar!" said Howse, between set teeth.

He flung open the oven, and peered inside. Then he darted his hand in, and brought out a tin plate half full of dry hash, with a fork still in it. Dry hash had formed part of the previous evening's cabin supper. A sailor's nose could detect the savory smell of that dish in a sulfur storm. The mate stared from the food to the sneering skipper, then placed the dish between the bars of the stove-fiddles to keep it secure, and stepped forward crouching.

"You hid that on us, you skunk? Fed your hungry belly while we sweated for you, and offered us hardtack? Outside with you! I'm going to hammer you."

"Leave me alone! I'm a sick man, I tell you!" cried Gedge, backing away from the menacing figure of the mate, and paling before the eyes that blazed into his.

"I warn you not to strike me," Gedge went on, dragging heavily after Howse in response to the fierce grip on his arm. "I never told you fools to sweat out here. I know, and if you had any sense you'd know, that the schooner'll float on her cargo forever. Leave me alone; go look after your slinking pet on the lockers inside."

"So that's your notion, eh? That's why you've laid doggo while I got my fingers and toes smashed to jelly out here, eh? All snug and warm, while the white-livered rat proved himself such a man as you'll never be in a million years! And you're a Master Mariner! You're a rank disgrace to a fine profession. Listen to the planks ripping away from the ribs—how long will she hang together, d'ye think? Eh? Now put up your hands, you yellow dog!"

A LONG gray sea roared up through the smashed bulwarks and sluiced along the deck knee-high. It picked up the raffle of spars and casks in the waist and carried them heavily against the mizzenmast, making that sturdy piece of timber groan and crack. Mr. Howse got in one solid jolt to his skipper's jaw, and thrilled with the relish of it; then he noticed that though Gedge might be guilty of malingering, his knee was shaky. Regretfully he dropped his hands.

"I can't scrap with a cripple," he mourned, and Gedge sneered triumphantly. "But," Howse supplemented, "a half-crippled pup as mean as you is the same to me as a mean kid, and I'll handle you according. Come here!"

With a skill born of many a sailing-day battle, he seized Gedge by the hair and tripped him behind the knees, flinging him to the streaming deck, face downward. Then he knelt on the skipper's neck with one knee, put the other knee firmly upon one outflung arm, seized the other arm with his own left hand, and reached with his right for a snaking rope-end. Another swishing sea climbed aboard, and swept over them, but it lacked the weight of former seas, and only resulted in choking Gedge's frantic protest into a wet gurgle.

"Now you poor specimen of a sailor," grunted Howse, with a wet, stiff rope-end in his good right fist, "when you say 'Mr. Howse, I'll work,' I'll let you up!" and the flail descended with a whistle.

A wet rope applied to wet pants by a righteous arm amid the stress of a North Atlantic gale is stiff medicine. Captain Gedge squirmed under a half dozen lusty strokes before he could clear his mouth of salt water to shout. Then he heaped upon the mate and steward and ship and sea a copious torrent of virulent abuse that only added ginger to his punishment.

Another hungry gray sea surged up the bursting side and lolloped aboard ominous with lazy strength, and when it passed it had carried the two struggling men aft to the very edge of the jarring, tossing raft timbers. The mate fought to retain his advantage, and once more in position he applied the rope with renewed gusto. Gedge blinked the water from his eyes and

Digitized by Google

saw the peril of those surging spars and casks. The rope swished down.

"Let me up—I'll help, blast you!" he howled.

The rope fell again, and again. The mate's knee lightened not a bit from the swelling neck.

"Let me up! D'ye want to drown me? We'll be smashed in that raffle in a minute."

Again the rope. And another sea, less in weight but full of portent.

"Mr. Howse, I'll work!" screamed Gedge, and lay still.

Mr. Howse stood up, cast away his rope, and helped the skipper to his feet. The grim visage relaxed, and his eyes shone with the light of justice satisfied.

"Get busy with the raft, now," he ordered, dashing the brine from his burning eyes. "Look out for your legs when the sea comes aboard, and pass the lashings good. I'll see what I can do for the doctor. I'll be right back with you."

Captain Gedge went silently to his task, all the tyrant, all the meanness whipped out of him. That terrible whipping at the mate's hands had more than bruised his flesh: it had cracked the crust of his soul.

His memory had to grope back many years for a similar sensation to that which now subtly began to steal through his being: straight back, in fact, to a time in adolescence when a thoughtless but cruel word to his over-indulgent mother had been promptly paid for through the medium of a horse-whip in the fist of a righteous father who believed implicitly in the "spare the rod, spoil the child" maxim. And the similarity of sensations in the two occasions engendered similar emotions.

As a chastised boy, Gedge had in time realized that meanness ought to be punished; now, a man, he was suddenly overwhelmed with a man's shame at the meanness he had allowed to grow within him. He shuddered at the thought that his own actions had warranted the desertion of his entire crew, leaving him to drown; and he knew that nothing except simple manhood, void of meanness, induced the mate and the steward to stand by him.

He could not at once throw off the heavy scowl from his face—his sheer physical anguish prevented that—but, as the mate entered the galley-door Gedge shouted after him:

"There's a flask of rum in my monkey-jacket pocket. Maybe it'll help th' steward, Howse."

Then he went to work, as a seaman should, and the raft lost nothing on the score of sailorly lashings. Money greed was alone responsible for making Gedge over from a capable seaman into a grasping brute; and his money greed was useless to him now. As he worked, his seaman's sense, long allowed to become dull, cried out to him to notice signs that had been plain to the mate all the while.

With every sea that swept the decks the thunder of the timber in the hold increased; the ripping crash overside and aft could mean nothing less than stripping planking from the hull itself; if the ear left any doubt, the eye satisfied it when great masses of wood shot up alongside after every heavy plunge of the racked schooner.

The mate came out and nodded approvingly at the work done; then he noticed that Gedge, coatless and barefooted, shivered in the biting wind in spite of his toil.

"That drop of rum fetched the doctor round a bit," said Howse. "You'd better take your jacket and boots. He don't need 'em and we can't lose much more time."

"Oh, let him keep 'em," growled the skipper, plunging afresh at the raft. "I'll be warm enough before we get this pile o' lumber overside. And—" he added, after a momentary hesitation—"there's a lot o' canned meat in the locker under the steward, Howse. We'd better have it handy."

"We'll finish this job first," replied the mate, diving into the task. "The galley is coming adrift. About three more big seas will carry it away. I've shut the doors tight to keep the water out, but we'll have to get the doctor out as soon as we can, and the grub can come out at the same time."

"By God! If the galley goes, we can't help him!"

"Then work like blazes, and let's get him lashed to the raft," retorted Howse, grimly. "He's helpless, and the only safe places for him are the raft and the galley."

"And the galley's a trap!" cried Gedge, furiously.

Again the insistent sea climbed through the broken bulwarks, washing both men heavily into the midst of their raft timbers. A tearing crack from the galley told of a parted lashing, and the galley was a separate box-house, built apart from the ship of stout timbers, and lashed to ringbolts in

Digitized by Google

the deck with six inches of clearance underneath to allow the water to run under it.

"Here, cut all the small line in reach and throw it on the raft," cried the skipper, unconsciously resuming command. "Make an end fast; we'll need all of it to lash with when she begins to part after we're afloat."

Mr. Howse grinned softly, and resumed his own rightful station as mate. He was no usurper, except in a righteous cause; and with the cause, the usurpation passed.

Now the raft was capable of bearing the three men and what provisions they could snatch. The mass of timbers lay on the deck, ready to float clear on a sea should the schooner suddenly break up or founder and a line at one corner held it to the mainmast. Mr. Howse felt in his pockets until he found his knife, then, with a last scrutiny of their handiwork, suggested briefly:

"Better get the steward out now, sir. I don't like the way she's rolling."

THE schooner lurched heavily to port, buried herself to the hatches, and slowly rolled back to the tune of tearing strakes. Her high bows dipped into the side of a roaring grayback, and the torrent surged over the forecastle.

"Hold on for your life!" shouted Gedge, snatching a turn of a line about his own wrist. The mate seized the mainmast in a tight body-hug.

Aft roared the sea. Divided at the forehatch, the two parts rolled together again, received added power from a licking crest that poured over the lower side, and crashed against the tottering galley with the thunder of Doom.

"God! He's gone!" gasped Gedge.

The galley was swept through the shattered bulwarks, and now it careened dizzily on the top of a sea, leaning down to one side and showing the tiny skylight on its top. The after wash of the same sea carried the raft overside, but the rope held it within reach. The schooner's decks cracked and heaved up; the foremast went by the board; the deeply wounded stern gaped like a giant wedge.

For one breathless instant skipper looked at mate. Then Mr. Howse seized the raft painter and hauled in on it.

"There's only one chance for the doctor," he muttered. "We may edge the raft down to him. It's a slim chance, sir; but I can't swim a lick." And something very like a groan burst from the mate's deep chest.

Together the two men hauled at the line, until the raft floated close in the disintegrating vessel's lee. Then both sprang on to it, and the mate slashed through the rope that held it as the mainmast fell and the *Centurion* fell apart like a house of cards. The galley floated lower, and as it tottered on the seas they could see the little skylight was smashed, and water poured in through it. The unwieldy raft was incapable of navigation in any given direction; but every sea that swept it carried it after the galley with its helpless inmate. Captain Gedge bent low on the raft, while the mate stared hopelessly at the galley.

"——! why can't I swim?" he muttered, fiercely.

"Here, bear a hand to knot this line," growled the skipper, flinging wet, tangled coils of small-stuff to him.

One end was knotted about his waist.

"You going after him? Oh, ginger! Can you make it, sir? By Godfrey, if you can I'll—but you can't! Your leg!" chattered Howse, in an ecstasy of doubt.

"Never mind my leg—knot the line!" growled Gedge. "I can swim with one leg through Niagara to get—to get the grub in that galley. Knot, you lunkhead!"

The mate's fingers flew. Length after length was bent on, and he dared not raise his head to look for the sinking galley. He was aroused by a shout, then a splash, and the line began to slip into the sea. He saw the skipper's head rise, and two mighty arms strike out in an overhand stroke, while one leg kicked out—the other trailed stiffly behind.

Now his attention was taken up in clearing the line and flinging it out in smooth coils; but he had time to watch that stubborn head as it sank and reappeared in the seas, ever nearing its goal.

Once the line fouled between two logs of the raft, and for ten seconds the skipper went out of sight, dragged under by the pull of the wet, heavy line. Howse worked like a madman to clear it; he saw the skipper emerge, strike out more desperately, then with a supréme effort grasp at the sloping roof of the galley and haul himself up on it. A hand waved limply, and the mate shouted:

"Oh Glory! the man's done it! By ——, I always said he was a real sailor!"

Then he hauled in on the line and slowly

Digitized by Google

drew the two derelict floats together.

The sea was littered with wreckage, and among it darted great square mahogany logs as deadly as torpedoes to anything in their path. Such a log surged head-on into the crazy raft, bursting lashings, and flinging the mate on his face. A hand was nipped between the raft timbers; but with set teeth Mr. Howse hauled away with a hand and wrist grip on the line until the raft crashed into the half-submerged galley. Then he raised his head and noticed that the galley-top was bare.

"Poor old Gedge is gone too!" he breathed, chokingly.

But a shapeless something appeared at the little skylight, and Howse strove to reach it. The galley was perilously near capsizing as his knee gripped the edge; but the bundle still came further out, and the mate grabbed it. He saw it was the steward, closely wrapped in potato and coal sacks, white of face, with tight-shut eyes.

Another bundle appeared at the skylight. And a muffled voice inside shouted—

"Catch hold—it's grub!"

The voice gurgled and died away as if the speaker were submerged. Howse dragged the sack of food on to the raft, then called out to the skipper. The reply came faint and watery; the skipper's purple face appeared in the skylight, his eyes shot with the fear of death, and he uttered grimly—

"No use, Howse, I can't get my shoulders through!"

That was it. It was one thing for a big man to drop through a tight aperture: gravity and stretch aided him in that: it was an entirely different problem to get those wide shoulders back through the same hole when no foot-hold availed below and no hand-hold was to be got above.

The mate was stunned by the horror of the thing. A few hours earlier he would willingly have left Gedge on the sinking ship to drown like the dog he then appeared; but things were altered now—and Howse could not swim.

Then his own jaw jutted out, and his eyes glinted with the light of a forlorn hope. He tore off his coat, kicked off his boots, tied a line about his own waist, and shouted:

"Don't let go, Skipper! Hang on to the skylight and keep your head up!"

Then, awaiting no reply, he floundered off the edge of the raft and grasped desperately for the wooden wedge that fastened the iron batten of the galley door.

His weight sank the side of the galley completely under water. His fingers, mashed and bleeding from his labors on the raft, wrenched at the wedge, tight with the water-soaking. All the time he was under water; his lungs were a bursting torment; his fingers grew numb with the grip to hold his position; he swallowed water.

Whirling bubbles and streaks of fire tortured his brain; his fingers worked mechanically, without guidance. Dully he felt that he had succeeded, but it didn't matter. There was a feeling, as he dropped into a delicious sleep, that the galley door had burst open and wrenched his fingers loose. He cared nothing. He was tired.

MR. HOWSE opened his eyes and looked blankly around. Still the same weltering sea, covered with a chaos of lumber. He shivered, and felt angry at being awakened from his soothing sleep to again face the stinging spray and the sweeping seas. Gradually he gathered his wits, and discovered that he was not drowned; the square-built figure of Captain Gedge stood erect on the raft, frantically waving a coat on a piece of hand-rail.

Something moved at his side, and he turned to look into the wide, inquiring eyes of the steward, chalky of face, but wholly alive. Then the skipper dropped his flag with a shout of relief, and knelt down by his two shipmates.

"Oh, boys, I'm tickled silly to see your eyes open again!" he howled, gripping a hand of each.

"Can't swim, eh, you old whale?" he whooped. "You're a blamed submarine, Howse! Got me out o' that rat-trap like a Gov'ment diver, you did—and look over there—to the eastward——"

He grinned as he paused, and rummaged in the pockets of his pilot jacket, still on the steward's back. He found his flask, half full, and pulled the cork.

"Here, boys," he said, "we'll splice the main-brace before that steamer picks us up. I drink to the best mate and steward a man ever sailed with."

"And," rejoined Mr. Howse, "Captain Gedge—white man!"

"Sign me on next voyage, sir," smiled the steward. And the steamer's boat, fifteen minutes later, picked up three quiet, thoughtful men.

Digitized by Google

"To Quit My Post"

by

Edwin C. Dickenson

Author of "The Will to Die" and "The Call of the Whippoorwill."

DARK as a street of dreams and like one, was the main street of Ortedo. Of a blackness that had a physical touch. The low, single-storied 'dobe "hotel" hid in the deeper darkness of a big mesquite bush with an air of lying-in-wait on the one side. On the other squatted a less pretentious and unwhitewashed hut with a black yawning doorway and sashless windows. Save for the camp, near by, the street had no other dwellings.

One end of it splayed out into the desert. The other lost itself in the shadow of the cottonwoods that bordered the creek with here and there the shaft of a Lombardy spearing up among them. There was the ford.

Above hung a million stars crowding the heavens down to the very horizon. Living stars, friendly stars, the only comfort of the man in olive-drab who strode back and forth across the width of the street softly crunching the sand of it under foot.

"My post extends from a point ten paces from the hotel to a point ten paces from the 'dobe hut. My orders are to pass no one but to call the corporal of the guard," he repeated to himself his special orders.

"Don't get too near either building," he recalled the cheerful admonition of the sergeant of the guard, "or you may get a knife between the ribs."

He was not afraid, Sentry of Post No. 4. There was even a pleasurable sense of excitement in the prospect. But it was different, this, than say from strolling along the equally quiet and deserted roads of his New England village at this hour.

It was puzzling to reason why, for instance, any one should wish to stick a knife between a fellowman's ribs when that other had no evil intent whatsoever. It was perplexing, too, to look at those mystic, desolate, mountains to the south and know that there were other human beings who, not openly, but with the stealth of the Indian, would stalk one like a wild beast and separate soul from body had they the chance.

The closely clustered pyramids of the sleeping camp were a more cheerful prospect. No. 4 pictured his tent-mates rolled up in their blankets in their comfortable cots. Yet, even they slept with their guns beside them, their outside clothing as conveniently arranged for speedy arrayment as a fireman's back home, confident of the machinery of the guard to awake them if the need came.

That was the Army, he wandered on in thought, a collection of cogs running the whole. It didn't matter greatly what happened to the cog so long as it fulfilled its function.

It was not that a knife between the ribs of Private Stark mattered much, but a knife between the ribs of Sentry, Post No. 4, mattered a great deal.

Digitized by Google

He whirled sharply. Something was moving down the road that flanked the camp and joined the main street of Ortedo at right angles. But his tense muscles relapsed for the object was four-footed and moving away from him—a cow, doubtless, as nocturnal here as a cat back home—or perhaps a horse, one of their own, that had slipped its halter and was wandering down to the ford to get a drink.

If it was the latter, No. 2 or No. 3 on the picket-line would miss it on the next check, or see it when it had drunk its fill and returned to the companionship of its kind. He let it go and resumed his beat. It was fourteen paces from one end of this to the other. He had counted it mechanically a score of times.

He glanced up the silent street and down. If they came in force, it would be across the ford. There was quicksand above and below it. Now and then he stopped and listened for the sound of many horses. The night was still. He should be able to hear them even in the desert sand.

He would not see them. Not, at least, until they had crossed the ford. The big cottonwoods screened the foot-hills beyond. Only the tips of the distant mountains rose above these.

Quite often, when the guard was shifted at one o'clock, the officer of the day had appeared with his lantern and taken the old relief to the bank of the creek overlooking the ford and there they had stood in the queer restraint of discipline, listening for that mysterious band of horsemen that never came.

Of course, he was only a Johnny but it seemed to him rather foolish to look for this kind of an enemy with a lantern.

He yawned and looked up at the friendly stars again. How could any one wish to kill on a night like this. There must be a God in those heavens and why should He stand for it? Thinking of God, he thought of his mother—or of the endless leagues that separated them.

Eight days it had taken to nearly cross the wide continent, unloading and loading their mounts at the various watering stations. When they had put the Mississippi behind them, it had seemed to him that they must be almost there. And they had traveled as many more days before they were. If anything should happen to her, if anything should happen to him. . . .

That would not do. He had learned long since that he must not think of home. It softened him.

A figure came down the street from the direction of the camp. He halted it and Sentry No. 1, who had orders to satisfy himself half-hourly that he, No. 4, was safe, answered.

He advanced him. Allen was his name, a tent-mate younger in age and service than he, even.

"Cold as the devil," muttered No. 1. "The O. D. caught me on my general orders. No. 5 was the one I fell down on. What is it, anyway?"

"To quit my post only when properly relieved," answered No. 4 glibly. He had learned them backward and forward and by the numbers. He knew them as he did his A. B. C's and they meant about as much to him.

"That's so. Well, guess I had better beat it back. The O. D.'s got it down so so fine that he wakes up if he doesn't hear your footsteps every thirty seconds."

No. 1 sauntered back and No. 4 took up his slow pace back and forth across the silent street.

It was getting cold, as Allen had said. The heat had gone out of the sand. A chill came up from the creek bottom. He wished he had worn his overcoat instead of his sweater.

He quickened his stride and unconsciously lengthened it. Fourteen paces. The hotel seemed to loom larger. Fourteen back. The dark doorway of the hut seemed peopled with weaving forms.

No. 4 halted. His gun came down to the ready. There had come the sound of a faint rustle within the door. Then "*Shsh*," came a low whisper.

No. 4's nerves tensed. He threw the safe off his rifle and his right forefinger felt for the trigger.

"It is I, 'Nita," spoke a low seductive voice. "Don't stand so. Go! When you come back—listen."

SCARCELY sensing what he did, No. 4 resumed the right shoulder, turned and walked away.

But his brain was awhirl. He knew the woman and that it was her voice. A young Mexican girl, daughter of one of the camp laundresses—a wild, pretty creature about whom they told an odd tale.

Digitized by Google

Her father had been shot by American soldiers in a border uprising many years before. It had been reported about the camp that the girl had made a childish threat to put poison in the soldiers' milk when they had first come to the station.

But they had laughed at her, made a pet of her, she was but little over sixteen, and she had come, after a time, to smile at the good-natured gringo soldiers, although at the first sign of familiarity her eyes would flash with something very like hate.

No. 4 had taken inventory of these antecedents before he had completed the fourteen paces out. He turned and walked back all his senses centered on the black doorway of the hut. What could she have to say to him?

No sound, no signs of life came from the doorway. He began to doubt his hearing. Yet he brought the Springfield down to the cradle of his left arm with his right hand about the trigger-guard. If it was a trick he would at least give warning with a shot before they could get him.

Step after step the distance shortened until he was within the prescribed interval.

Out of the darkness came again that soft whispering voice.

"Meet me at the ford at midnight. Tell no one."

Then came the sound of quick, retreating footsteps across the floor of the hut.

"But 'Nita——" he began.

"Silence," she answered from the further side of the room. "They will kill me."

He could not let her go with that scanty word. He stepped to the open door and thrust his head inside in time to see a slender form disappear out the rear door. She had gone.

Mechanically he shouldered his gun and resumed his post.

What should he do, call the corporal of the guard? That was what he ought to do, he knew. But that was to betray the girl and she had said to tell no one. And suppose it was a prank. He would be the laughing stock of the camp—the man who turned out the guard because a girl whispered to him. No, he would not call the corporal of the guard.

But should he meet the girl at the ford? What if she had a warning for the camp? It was not likely, to be sure. There had been no disturbance along the border for some time. Patrols were covering the main passes through the mountains to the south every few days and reported everything quiet.

Yet there was always the possibility of a raid, else they might never have been stationed at this outpost, and this was a treacherous foe.

Behind one of the posts of the wire fence that surrounded the camp stood a lantern left there for the purpose of examining any carts that might go through, for contraband. No. 4 went over to it and glanced at his watch. It was a quarter of twelve. He was not relieved until one o'clock. The officer of the day had inspected the present relief and according to No. 1, turned in. The ford was but two hundred yards away. He could go there and back without being missed. It was little more than a matter of seconds.

The subtle beauty of the night, the wild country about him, the seductiveness of the whispered invitation, wove the webs of romance in his young brain. This dark-eyed languorous maid of the South would be waiting for him by the creek in the shade of the big cottonwoods. If he did not come she would hold him in scorn—a gringo and afraid!

Back and forth he strode, his vision turned in on himself. Back in the North he had pictured this sort of thing. By the day, wild dashing charges, quick work with the pistol, a scared foe, praise from his officers. At night, laughing, sloe-eyed señoritas coquetting from palm-shaded windows.

How different had been the reality—until now. A sun that pierced his Northern skull; drifting sand that suffocated; ditches dug in volcanic ash; horses groomed three times a day; and food that sickened in its unending sameness.

No. 4 was young, he was human. Woman in all the ancient strength of her appeal called to him now and all that fought against this appeal was a hitherto meaningless collection of words that formed themselves in line and marched and remarched through his tortured brain. Words that he had learned out of a slim brown book, words that he had repeated over and over, time out of mind. Words that he knew as No. 5 of the general orders—"To quit my post only when properly relieved."

Even when he had supplied this missing link to the forgetful No. 1 the significance

Digitized by Google

of these words had not been borne in on him. He knew, of course, that he must not leave his post during his relief. Yet never until now had this come home to him with the force of a written injunction. This was one of the ten military commandments and of all perhaps the most important.

Yet there must be exceptions even to these iron laws. The creek was but a matter of a few strides away. He could watch his post from the bank of it. From the brow of this gentle slope that led down to the ford he ought to be able to see, too, the slender form of the waiting girl. There could be little danger in going that far.

He stopped half-way across the street. Another cow was crossing the foot of it, wandering slowly down toward the ford. Or was it a horse? There was an odd hump on its back, it seemed to him, but it might be a trick the night played on his vision.

He was seized with a sudden idea that promised the solution to the question tormenting him. What if it were a horse and bore a crouched rider? Ought he not to satisfy himself as to that? Even if the search led him to the ford it was an excuse, at least. He took a quick step toward the animal, halted, swore, and turned back. He could not leave his post.

Then came the sound of running footfalls down the street close to the hotel. He turned and saw a dark figure slipping by in the shadow of the mesquite.

"Halt. Who's there!" he challenged.

"Keep quiet, can't you. It's Allen," answered the impatient voice of No. 1 in a low tone. "Be right back. Got a date at the ford," and he ran on.

FOR a moment No. 4 stood as if frozen there. "A date at the ford?" He saw it now. 'Nita had whispered that seductive invitation to No. 1 too. Perhaps to No. 2 and No. 3 on the picket line. Even at this minute it might be that the camp was unguarded save by him. He waited no longer.

"Corporal of the Guard, Post No. 4," he shouted in a voice that swept the silent camp like a clarion.

And then he pulled the trigger of his Springfield.

No. 4 could never remember later, the sequence of events, but he never forgot the shuddering wail of death that came up from the creek bottom. There were scattering shots from the same direction and two men came running over the brow of the bank before him. He knelt and covered them, saw that they were his own kind, and withheld his fire.

Behind him he had heard the camp wake to quick life, the sharp voice of the O. D. calling "turn out the guard."

The two soldiers ran panting by him, stopped and threw themselves flat beside him.

Then, swarming up from the ford came a mass of horsemen yelling and shooting. He fired into them. A shot came from either side of him. The faithless guardsmen were firing too.

He heard No. 1 sobbing as he worked his bolt.

"They got Bolton. The girl stuck a knife between his ribs."

The horsemen were almost on them now, spurring their animals to the gallop, shouting their barbaric cries. The street seemed full of them. No. 4 fired his last shot and drew his automatic. There was no time to reload the rifle.

Then he threw himself flat beside the other two and nearly wept in relief for behind him came first a few halting shots that burst into the steady crash of the machine gun, mounted to cover the road.

He saw the mass of horsemen pull up, waver. He glanced back over his shoulder and watched the stream of fire spitting from the terrible weapon, sending a sheet of steel a few feet above his head. A cry of exaltation from No. 1 beside him brought his eyes back to the horsemen. Like a retreating flood they were falling back over the bank of the creek.

The machine gun dribbled to silence. The guard came running toward them. No. 1 was sobbing again.

"Poor Bolton," he cried, "and they almost got Thorne and me."

No. 4 was muttering something, too, in his excitement. Over and over again it came unbidden to his lips——

"To quit my post only when properly relieved."

Digitized by Google

Nerves of Iron

by W. C. Tuttle

Author of "A Bull Movement in Yellow Horse," "Cows is Cows," etc.

"WELL," says Magpie Simpkins, sliding off the rock, and hitching up his belt. "Now that there seems to be uh lull in the firing we might as well pilgrim down and see if we can patch up the injured."

He kicks the lead burro in the north end, and we points off down the trail.

Nobody knows where we're going—me and Magpie. Sometimes we just follers other men's trails and then again we follers our yaller burro. We calls that burro, Lodestone. We always let him pilgrim on ahead, and when he opines to leave the beaten trail and wander afield, we agrees that he's just as apt to stumble on uh good prospect as we are, so we follers his hunch.

This time his hunch don't look good, 'cause he's leading us back into civilization. Right now we're on uh well-beaten trail, and unless all signs fail we're pretty close to uh village.

All to once we hears pistol-shots around uh bend in the trail and, not wishing to interrupt such pastimes, we takes uh little rest until the smoke clears away.

We ambles around the first turn into an open spot and stops. There we observe uh little feller, about knee-high to uh tall Injun. He's got his back to us, standing alongside uh stump, the same of which he's examining some industrious. I opines that he's uh shepherd, 'cause he's talking to himself.

"Too danged high!" he complains. "This one's too high, too! Dang the ornery luck, anyway!"

"Hold lower, old-timer," advises Magpie.

The little feller don't even look our way. He just dives head first into the brush and disappears.

"Now wouldn't that rasp yuh!" wonders Magpie out loud. "That looked like uh he human and acts like uh hell-diver. I'd orate that he ain't noways looking for company."

We stands there and looks at the spot where he went in, and then looks foolish at each other.

"I begs your pardon, gents," states uh little apologetic voice behind us, and there we see the little feller again. "You sort uh took me by surprise. Sabe?"

That person never growed none after he was ten years old. Except for the hair, and lines uh care on his face he'd pass for uh kid. He's got uh scared look in his eyes, and uh man-sized six-gun in his hand. He shoves the gun inside the waistband of his pants and the sight interferes with his knee-movement. He licks his lips and sticks his hand out to Magpie.

"I'm Stonewall Jackson," says he.

"What's in uh name, anyway," grins Magpie, shaking the runt's hand hearty like. "My name is Grant—Ulysses Grant. The party with me is Robert Lee. The other two jackasses are named Lodestone and Cæsar, and we're pleased to meet yuh."

"I've heard of yuh," states Stonewall. "I've heard yuh all well spoken of except the mules. Mules is just mules. How's all your folks?"

"Dead, thank you," says Magpie. "How's yours?"

"Don't mention it. Maw's in Denver

Digitized by Google

and paw ain't much better off unless he went where he wasn't expecting to. He died last year."

"Live around here?" I asks, just to make conversation. When Magpie gets to letting his imagination run rings around his judgment his conversation favors uh shepherd's convention.

"Down to Spotted Dawg," replies Stonewall. "When I first hears yuh speak I thought yuh was one of the inhabitants."

"Spotted Dog?" wonders Magpie. "That name ain't noways familiar to me. Spotted Dog!"

Stonewall sets down on uh rock and manufactures uh cigaret, and me and Magpie follers suit.

"Good town?" I asks.

Stonewall inhales deep like and nods.

"Uh-huh. Town's all right, I reckon. Spotted Dawg is like hell in that respect. Hell ain't so danged bad by its own self—it's the people in it. Sabe?"

"Particular?" asks Magpie, and Stonewall nods again.

"Very much thataway. They elected me city marshal uh few days ago."

Me and Magpie loses faith in Spotted Dog right away.

"Ike," says Magpie, "Lodestone's done played us uh scurvy trick when he points this way. The rest of the day I'll lead the caravan."

We gits up, points the jacks the other way, and prepares to leave. Stonewall looks up at us, rubs the stubble on his chin, an' swallers so hard that his Adam's apple almost hit his knees.

"That ain't what I'd call uh friendly deal uh tall," he wails. "Deserting uh feller when he's in trouble! Gosh A'mighty, I wouldn't do that to uh pack-rat."

"Neither would I," replies Magpie. "But you got to figger, old-timer, that you ain't no pack-rat."

"Well, go on then," says Stonewall, weary like. "If I ever get another friend I'm going to shoot him before he has uh chance to change his opinion. Go on—nobody gives uh dang, anyway."

"If yuh don't like Spotted Dog why don't yuh move away?" I asks.

"Well," he replies, digging his toe in the dirt, "yuh see there's several reasons. In the first place I'm engaged to marry an angel. In the second place, I'm an officer of the law, and the third and fourth places is 'High-Card' Hammond and 'Whisperin'' Wilson. The first reason makes me sort uh want to stay; the second is my duty and the third and fourth won't let me."

"Why won't they let yuh go?" asks Magpie.

"It's thisaway," wails Stonewall. "Spotted Dawg has always been uh law-abiding community. The law and order bunch has decorated our one lone shade-tree numerous and sundry times with outlaws, gunmen and such like folks. In the course uh human events, High-Card Hammond and Whisperin' Wilson drifts into Spotted Dawg. They gets popular and previous on short acquaintance and picks trouble with 'Slickear' Saunders, our city marshal.

"The town has been so danged peaceful fer so long that Slickear is rusty on the draw. We raises enough to send his widder back to Missouri to her maw. High-Card and Whisperin' immediate and soon gits control of the administration, and by doing uh little political work has me elected marshal by uh five-vote lead over 'Limpy' Myers.

"HONEST to goodness, I couldn't help it, gents! I never wanted the job. According to all humanity I ought to be down there right now, filling their carcasses with lead, but I ain't got the nerve. My Gawd! I can't shoot! I been out here 'most all day practising with that pistol but I can't even hit uh tree. No nerve and no ability. High-Card told me that if I run out on him he'd foller me and cut my ears off. What am I going to do, eh?"

"What does the rest of the inhabitants think?" I asks.

"Them what ain't laughin' is gittin' ready to move. I was going to get married to-morrow afternoon, too. Dang the ornery luck!"

"Time ain't nothing to an angel," consoles Magpie. "What does she think of your election?"

"That's the —— of it!" wails Stonewall. "She likes it. She opines that I'm the little Jasper what is going to make Spotted Dawg uh place uh beauty and uh joy forever. All the time she's thinking that I'm going gunning fer them bad men. Me! Holy henhawks! I ain't never killed nobody! I'm fer peace. Now she'll think I'm uh coward, and ditch me! I reckon I might as well point away from Spotted Dawg and forget my

Digitized by Google

love, and take uh chance on my ears."

"Ears ain't everything," consoles Magpie, again. "I knowed uh feller once who had both ears chawed off close to his head and he didn't look so danged bad at that. You could wear uh cap with ear-flaps."

"Aw—I don't know," sighs Stonewall. "One thing I do know—I ain't no hero, and I can't shoot fer sour beans. If I was shooting fer eagle feathers I wouldn't harvest the down off uh humming-bird."

"Is this here High-Card and Whisperin' dead shots?" asks Magpie.

"Too dead to skin!" pronounces Stonewall. "They brags that they always git their man through the heart."

"I'd admire to meet them," states Magpie, rolling uh smoke and looking about as fierce as uh jack-rabbit at uh grizzly funeral. "I used to brag thataway myself but one day I gets sort uh hurried like and hits my man uh inch too high. Uh course he passed out, but it wasn't what you'd designate as uh clean hit."

"How's your aim?" asks Stonewall, looking at me, and Magpie replies—

"Ike ain't never missed his man yet."

Uh course Magpie didn't state that I ain't never hit one yet. Me and him is about as belligerent as uh pair uh fool hens. Uh course we wears all the ornaments of uh gunman, and are able to make uh loud noise and plenty uh smoke, but that about lets us out.

"——!" snorts Stonewall, when Magpie's statement percolates through his head. "I'm glad I met yuh before Spotted Dawg did, 'cause otherwise I'd have to grow some extra ears so's everybody'd have uh chance. Are yuh for me or against me? I ain't complaining. Sabe?"

"This here angel;" says Magpie, "do yuh like her uh heap?"

"Like uh starving bronc loves bunch-grass."

"That's the attitude, old-timer," states Magpie. "Ike, you and me is going to Spotted Dog."

Spotted Dog was what you'd designate as uh pedigreed place. She was sired by uh prospector named "Doughbelly" Smith, and dammed by everybody west of the Missouri River.

Typographically she was uh mess and morally she was uh crime. One side of the street harbors three saloons and uh post-office, and the other side balances the place with three more saloons and uh general store.

There's dance-halls over some of the saloons, and over one of them is the City Hall. She's shy on sidewalks and visible means uh support. There is also uh few dwelling-places.

We pilgrims almost into it when we hears sounds uh life. Out into the street gallops uh person, coat-tails flying, and uh gun in each hand. Said person loses his hat from uh pistol-shot, and dives behind uh barrel in front of uh saloon, where he squats and proceeds to spin lead across the street from whence he came.

Stonewall gits behind Lodestone and shrinks until the smoke clears away.

"Looks interesting, anyway," says Magpie. "Is that uh usual happening?"

"Every time the council meets," states Stonewall. "That person who is behind the barrel is Luke Paulsen. I'd opine that he's shooting at Tug Tilton. Yuh see, them two is councilmen of our fair city, and they disagrees on things. Luke wants to put up some hay-scales on the main street and Tug wants to spend the treasury for uh boat. They can't seem to get together."

"Do they grow hay around here?" I asks.

"Nearest hay ranch is thirty miles away," grins Stonewall. "But that ain't no argument in favor uh Tilton's scheme. Yuh can't find water enough to take uh bath in within twenty-five miles of here."

"Who's the mayor?" asks Magpie.

"High-Card Hammond. Whisperin' Wilson's the treasurer."

"Well," opines Magpie, "it looks to me as though the only straight thing in this here place is the road out uh town."

"You ain't met the angel yet," reproves Stonewall.

"Excuse me, old-timer," apologizes Magpie. "I didn't include women in my statement."

"You're welcome," says Stonewall. "I reckon we better not go right down the main street. We'll take your burros right down to my cabin. Yuh see, I'm supposed to collect five dollars for each mule what comes into town, and—well, I ain't going to do it this time."

"Five dollars for uh burro!" snorts Magpie. "What do yuh mean?"

"City ordinance," explains Stonewall, apologetic like. "When the new city officials went into office they passes uh rule to the effect that prospectors is uh nuisance, and

Digitized by Google

they opines to assess every prospector five dollars per head to bring his beasts uh burden into the place. Sabe?"

"By cripes! I never heard uh such uh thing!" howls Magpie.

"You never heard uh Spotted Dawg until yuh met me, either," states Stonewall chiding like.

We throws the packs off at his cabin and turns the burros loose.

"What'll they do if they sees strange burros," I asks.

"Likely pick 'em up and sell 'em to somebody. They can't divide two burros, but that bunch shore can split money like uh bunch uh bankers. Mebby they won't notice 'em. As soon as they finds out that you're uh couple uh gunmen they'll feel different toward your rolling-stock."

"Where will they get the information?" I asks.

"I'll tell 'em," states Stonewall. "Doggone, I'd sure like to flustrate that bunch."

"Well, I sure hope it does," I replies.

After a while Stonewall informs us that he's going to sneak up-town and see what's going on, so me and Magpie pats him on the back and wishes him many happy returns of the day.

We sets down in the shady side of the shack and enjoys uh smoke.

"Scary little devil, that Stonewall Jackson person," opines Magpie. "Ike, I reckon that Spotted Dog is more of uh coyote than dog. I figgers that uh pair uh mean hombres has done took control of the place, and they elects that poor little Jasper to the marshal's office so that them and their friends can do as they danged well please in Spotted Dog. I feel for him, Ike."

"I could feel uh heap sadder if I was uh long ways from here," I replies. "This here business uh trying to adjust the workings of uh place like this don't appeal to me uh tall. Supposing that we meets up with this bad bunch, Magpie, and they takes exceptions to the way we wears our hats? Suppose the marshal person informs them that we're uh pair uh gun-fighting Jaspers, and they opines to make us prove it. What are we going to do then, Mister Magpie Simpkins?"

"Go bareheaded and prove an alibi, Ike," laughs Magpie. "I ain't no speed demon with uh six-gun, Ike, but by the horns on the moon, I ain't afraid uh no man that hankers for uh boat on uh desert. Also, I'm again' any man who pines for hay-scales."

"Me neither, Magpie," I agrees. "I ain't afraid to meet no man on earth—whether he's uh hay-scale nut or uh mariner of the desert—but just because I'm brave thataway ain't no reason for me to get cocky about it and poke fun at uh hornet's nest."

"Discretion is the foundation of uh fighter's trade, Ike," opines Magpie. "Yuh don't have to go poking—my cripes!"

"HAS anybody seen Stonewall Jackson?" asks a female voice.

"The angel!" hisses Magpie in my ear.

I remember that my maw used to dilate on angels when I was young. She used to tell me all about how beautiful and sweet they are, and how they wears floating garments and carries long golden trumpets and wears wings. I reckon it's all in your point uh view. Now, this one that Stonewall designates as an angel ain't noways my maw's idea uh tall. If Stonewall's right, my maw must uh shut her eyes when she pulled the trigger, 'cause she never even nicked the bull's-eye.

This here angel would scale about two hundred dressed, and from what I can see of her feet she wasn't built to fly—she was built to swim. Instead of uh trumpet she's packing uh six-gun. It's one uh them muzzle-loading Colts, with uh barrel as long as uh shepherd's sleep.

"Ah ha!" sez I to myself. "If that thing goes off there won't be no use for uh census-taker in this country for years and years."

"I asked uh question," she states.

"Ma'am," sez Magpie, "nobody ain't seen him. Are you looking for the gentleman?"

She sizes us up some careful like, and peeks around the corner.

"Are you keeping something from me?" she asks, sort of belligerent like.

"Ma'am," replies Magpie, sudden like, "when an angel packs uh gun my innermost thoughts is like the large letters on uh patent-medicine advertisement. Would yuh mind pointing that mortar the other way?"

"I want to find Stonewall," says she, complying with Magpie's request.

"You can't—not with uh gun," I states. "I don't know him very well, but I know yuh can't entice him with uh gun."

"Huh!" says she, scornful like, or as scornful like as uh fat face like hers can look. "You

Digitized by Google

think so, do yuh? You don't know Stony. Just because he's small in stature you think he ain't brave. Huh! He's got the heart of uh lion, let me tell yuh! Didn't they elect him marshal of Spotted Dog? Ain't that proof enough? I want to find him and give him this gun. You're strangers here, ain't yuh?"

"Yes'm, we're strangers here," I replies.

"That goes to show that you don't know what you're talking about. Know where he is now?"

"Ma'am," replies Magpie, "I reckon you ought to know. He's gone up to tell the mayor and treasurer that this evening he's going to walk down the main street with uh gun on his hip, and he dares any danged man to show his head."

She absorbs the information by degrees, and scratches her head with the gun-barrel, while uh sad look comes over her face

"There's uh difference between cold nerve and danged foolishness," she opines, after a while. "I'd say that Stony's covering uh little too much territory. Did he say, 'Any danged man'?"

Me and Magpie nods, grave like.

"Me and him was going to get married tomorrow, too," says she, sad like. "Got my troosoo all ready to slip on. Maybe I can dye it black—I don't know."

"I wouldn't grieve, ma'am," consoles Magpie, wiping uh sympathetic tear off his long nose. "There's just as good fish in the sea as—as there is in the desert. If I was you I'd——"

Magpie's advice is cut short, when uh rattle uh shots sounds up-town, and we stirs uneasy like.

"There!" exclaims the angel. "That's Stonewall! I'll bet!"

"You lose, ma'am," says Magpie. "Here's Stonewall!"

"Here" was the right word! When it comes to speed I'll play the small man plumb across the board, but there wasn't no show or place money in this race. Not any!

That Stonewall Jackson person could give uh jack-rabbit twenty yards' handicap and throw dirt in its face inside of uh hundred yards. He was hitting such uh pace that he danged near goes past the cabin. He sticks his heels in the ground and skids the last fifteen feet and enters the cabin without brushing either side of the door. We all stands there for uh moment, sort uh dazed like, and then Magpie yawns and opines:

"Anybody's liable to run out of ammunition and have to come home after more. Yuh got to consider that he challenged the whole town, and his gun only holds six shells."

"Uh yard uh discretion is worth uh whole bolt uh valor," says I.

"Uh-huh," she agrees, hearty like. "Self-preservation is better than uh fancy funeral, too, but——"

Just then Stonewall sticks his head out of the door and wipes his clammy brows with his handkerchief. He sees the angel, and grins, foolish like.

"Some day, Stonewall," says she, "your bravery is going to be the cause of me wearing widder's weeds. How many did yuh kill?"

"I—I—I came away without my—huh—gun!" stutters Stonewall.

"Did you come back to get it?" she asks.

"N—n—n—no. But I'll have to go back to get it. My——!"

He sets down on uh box and pants like an overheated pup. The angel looks at us and then at Stonewall, and hitches up her skirts.

"Do you mean to tell me, Stonewall Jackson, that you didn't kill nobody?"

"Ma'am," interrupts Magpie, "you got to figure that he done just what he promised he'd do. I makes him agree not to kill nobody until later on in the day. All he was supposed to do this trip was to give 'em fair warning. Sabe? It must uh been mighty hard for him to stay his natural inclinations to smoke up somebody, so yuh got to give him credit for keeping his word and for having great self-control. Mister Jackson is uh man of his word, and I'm proud to shake his hand."

Magpie steps over and shakes the unresisting hand of Stonewall Jackson, and Stonewall looks like uh man what has just filled uh royal flush on uh four-card draw.

"Thanks, Mister Grant," says Stonewall. "How's your folks?"

"Dead as usual. How's yours?"

"I brought you this, Stony," says the female, before the runt has uh chance to reply.

She holds out that antiquated smoke-box for Stonewall's approval.

"I wouldn't let nobody but you have this. I sure think uh lot of this pistol, Stony,

Digitized by Google

dear. It is believed that uh bullet from this pistol killed my poor old paw."

She wipes away uh tear, while Stonewall holds the relic at uh safe distance.

"Somebody shoot him with it?" I asks.

"Nobody knows," she sniffs. "When we found him he was dead, and the gun was empty. He was hit five times, and the bullets were the same as the gun used."

"Uh-huh," agrees Magpie, examining the muzzle of the thing. "Your paw was uh brave man. This weapon will be uh great help to our courageous marshal, if yuh asks me. It's loaded, too."

"Yes, I loaded it myself," replies the angel, and then she pats the runt on the shoulder.

"You won't take foolish chances will you, dear?"

"No, ma'am," says Stonewall. "I'll be just as careful as I can, Eveline."

Eveline, the angel, paddles back the way she come, and we watches her out uh sight.

"LOVELY thing," sighs Magpie. "She'll make uh man out uh you."

"Maybe," says Stonewall, sad like. "Maybe uh corpse, too. I got to display nerve to win her, and that same display may hang uh black rag on my cabin door. I'm sure obliged for your assistance in the time uh need. You sure must uh had lots of experience to fix up uh lie that quick."

"Speed is as essential with uh lie as it is with uh gun," states Magpie. "Especially when you're lying to uh woman. Was somebody shooting at yuh up-town?"

"I don't know."

The runt shakes his head sad like, and rolls uh smoke with shaky fingers.

"I meets Limpy Myers on my way up-town, and I tells him that down to my cabin is two of the hell-firedest gun-fighters what ever fanned uh hammer. Limpy seems uh heap interested and orates that he'll pass the news. I plumb forgot the hay-scale-*versus*-boat controversy and walks right into the line uh fire.

"Limpy told me that it was settled, and that part of the gang is over at the Tammany saloon, christening the boat and the other faction is giving first aid to Luke. I reckon that some uh Luke's friends was trying to shoot holes in them sailors."

"Where's your gun?" I asks.

"Too heavy, so I throws it away. Yuh see uh feller can't run when his gun keeps hitting him on the knee that way."

The little feller hunches over on the box and resumes his complaint.

"I don't reckon it's much use noways. Ever since I was small I has uh fear uh getting shot. I reckon that sooner or later Eveline will find it out and ditch me. She orates that she can't stand for no man what ain't brave, and like uh danged fool I lies to her about my past. According to what I've told her she'd expect me to walk right up and bite uh grizzly. It ain't lying when yuh brags to uh woman about yourself—it's unjustifiable suicide."

"Never lie to uh lady," advises Magpie, and Stonewall grins.

"That's hy-iu advice, but you don't foller it. You lied uh plenty to Eveline."

"Maybe," half agrees Magpie. "Maybe yes and maybe no."

"Well," says Stonewall, chiding like, "you told her that I went up there to dare anybody to stick their heads outside, and that was uh lie. I never said uh thing about——"

"Listen;" snaps Magpie. "Do yuh actually want to marry that Eveline party?"

"In holy wedlock tomorrow afternoon," admits Stonewall. "Yes sir."

"Then you let me be your manager for today, and I'll bet you'll have uh lot of admirers to your wedding tomorrow," states Magpie. "You do just what I tell you to and we'll put them bad men on the run. Sabe?"

"I ain't got no nerve!" protests Stonewall.

"You admires to marry Eveline, don't yuh?" asks Magpie, and the runt nods, hearty like.

"Well," says Magpie, "that's evidence that you have. Ain't that right, Ike?"

"He's got Jessie James looking like uh nervous wreck," says I.

The runt seems to cheer up uh heap at them words, and gits ambition enough to borrow my tobacco and papers.

"Oh, yes!" says he, after his smoke is going. "They got your mules."

"The —— they did?" says I. "How do you know?"

"They was tied in front of the Nickle Plate saloon. I didn't stop to examine 'em close but I think I recognized that yaller one."

This information makes me mad. This here town of Spotted Dog don't appeal to

Digitized by Google

me noways, and I sure do love them burros. Who ever heard of uh place like this anyway? Who is ever going to believe that there ever was uh place like Spotted Dog. After thinking it all over I opines that I'm dreaming, and I drops uh rock on my foot. Uh course I has to drop it on my favorite corn.

Some folks preys on their imagination and others takes to strong liquor to brace up their nerves, but whenever I wants to git into uh fighting mood, all I has to do is to annoy that corn. I immediate and soon gets fighting mad, and the madder I get the more I admires to get them jacks out uh durance vile.

"I'm going up and get them burros back!" I states, and Magpie nods.

"Yes, Ike, I reckon that would be uh good resolution to carry out. We sure can't get along without them animiles."

My corn sends uh shot uh agony up my shin-bone, again, and I gets belligerent.

"I'm going right now!" says I.

"Yes," agrees Magpie. "Right now, Ike."

"And I'm going to shoot —— out of anybody what crosses my path, too!"

"Happy New Year," says Magpie. "I gives you power of attorney to shoot some for me, Ike. Want to borrow another gun? Here's mine, and may your days be many in the land of the living, pardner."

I LIMPS into the main street of Spotted Dog, with uh gun on each hip and agony in my feet. Uh feller is setting in front of the first saloon, on uh whisky-keg. He just gives me one look, and stumbles over the doorway in his hurry.

I pilgrims straight to the Nickle Plate, and finds Lodestone and Cæsar tied to the rack out in front. Somebody starts out of the door, sees me and goes right back inside again. I walks over and pats Lodestone on the shoulder, keeping my eye on the saloon door all the time, and jist like it always happens, that blamed jackass plants one forefoot on that corn and leans lovingly against me.

I kicks him so blamed hard that I hears his ribs rattle against his jaw-bone, and than I ambles right up to that saloon door and kicks it open.

From the looks uh things I'm expected. There's uh reception committee lined up against the bar and I can see at uh glance that there's an extra glass on the bar. I balances on one foot in the doorway, and chaws the end of my mustache. I sure am suffering uh heap.

"Mister," says uh long-faced hombre, with one cross-eye, "we welcomes yuh to Spotted Dog. Step right up and take uh drink on the city. She's yours."

"I don't want it," I replies. "It don't appeal to my artistic sense uh tall. I'm looking for the Jasper what appropriates my burros."

"I took 'em," wheezes uh square-headed cross between uh Greaser and uh whisky-runner. "I jist took 'em to——"

"Thanks," says I, "I'm obliged to yuh for tying 'em up for me. They're sure liable to stray in uh strange country."

All this time my corn is easing up uh little.

I pours out uh glass uh hooch and says "how," to the crowd.

"My name's Hammond," states the tall one, who invited me to take the city. "Usually called High-Card. This party—indicating the square-headed wheezer—is Whisperin' Wilson. We're mayor and treasurer, respectably, uh Spotted Dog, and we greets yuh happily. Where's your pardner?"

"He's down at the city marshal's residence cleaning his guns," says I, refilling my glass on the city.

They all grins uh heap, and I appears to wonder what the joke is. High-Card explains, but he don't tell me much that I don't already know.

"Our city marshal has got less nerve than anything on earth. He opines to git married to-morrow, and we're planning to scare him so danged bad at that time that he'll run all the way through Wyoming and so far into Utah that the Mormons will marry him to six different women before he can get back to the line."

We has another drink or two and gets right friendly.

"So you and your pardner was the pair what cleaned up the Dolan bunch, eh?" observes Whisperin'. "That sure was some chore. I knowed Jim Dolan when he was up in Custer County, and he sure was one fast person on the draw. I heard tell that you held your hand above your head and let him git hold of his gun before yuh yelled for him to git uh-going."

"Plumb correct," says I. "How'd he ever lose that left eye? Did yuh ever hear?"

Digitized by Google

"Horse uh mine throwed him once when he was drunk. He was one good rider, too."

"Did he ever tell yuh about the time that him and 'Windy' Bowers held on to the corner of uh handkerchief and emptied their guns into each other?" I asks.

"Huh!" snorts Whisperin'. "Did he? Well, I reckon he did. Showed me the scars, too."

"Well," says I to myself, "honesty sure ain't no drug on the market in Spotted Dog, and that's uh cinch. If there ever was uh Jim Dolan or uh Windy Bowers I never heard tell of 'em."

We has uh little more wet weather together, and then I'm invited to mingle the pasteboards uh little, and see if two deuces can beat three of uh kind.

Mine did. Not wishing to carry all that extra weight on my hips, I slips them guns out of their holsters and lays 'em on my lap. Immediate and soon I wins forty dollars on uh bobtail flush, and I know that Whisperin' held uh queen full on sevens. I accidently turns his hand over as I rakes in the pot. High-Card held three eights.

"I hears that your pardner is the fastest man in Montana with uh six-shooter," remarks High-Card, after we settles the supremacy in uh pot, which I wins with two deuces and three hearts.

"We're about uh standoff," I replies.

That's about the first truth that's been spoken since I came in. We sure are. Magpie orates to me one day that he's getting fast with uh gun, and essays to prove it. He argues that the first shot must be fired as the gun comes out of the holster, no matter whether it hits or not, and then uh crook of the wrist gets the rest away on schedule time.

His first shot hit. He was so blamed fast that he didn't wait for the gun to come out of the holster, and the bullet nicks his kneecap and amputates his little toe. He gets her out for the next shot but he crooks his wrist too much, and shoots uh brace uh ca'tridges out uh my belt. I admits that he's uh heap previous, and runs errands for him for uh week.

When he gets well I tells him that I been practising the draw, and wishes him to observe my dexterity. He beats it around behind the cabin and yells:

"Take your time, Ike! There ain't no hurry!"

The bartender seems to admire me uh heap, keeping up uh running conversation and uh goodly supply uh hooch.

I ain't never been treated thataway before and the longer I stays the longer I'm convinced that uh feller don't gain nothing by being meek and mild among men.

I've always wondered what anybody could find in being bad that was so alluring, but I'm beginning to find out. I picks off uh fat pot on uh four-card draw against three pat hands, and I mentally pats Lodestone on the rump and feels contrite in my soul for kicking him thataway.

Every time I shifts them guns there's an immediate rush to the discard. Seems like nobody can hold good hands but me. We plays along serene like for uh couple uh hours, and High-Card shoves back his chair, sort uh weary like.

"You sure do sabe this here national pastime," sez he, sizing up the few cords uh chips in front of me. "Yes, sir, I'd say that you plays uh mighty clever game."

"I remember the time I played 'Five-Fingered' Fulton single-handed freeze-out to see which one committed suicide," sez I, sort uh reminiscent like. "That was uh good game."

"Ain't it funny how folks git things wrong in the tellin'?" complains High-Card, surprised like. "I heard that you and him cut cards for it."

I took another drink on the city, and wondered who in blazes Five-Fingered Fulton was. Spotted Dog must uh been Ananias's old home town.

I cashes in two hundred and eighty-seven dollars and accepts another slice on the fair city.

"If you needs any help with them mules I'm uh heap familiar with the tribe," says Tug Tilton.

I leans over and inspects Tug's ears for uh moment and shakes my head.

"You sure ought to be," says I. "No, I don't need yuh, old-timer. I knows my own stock."

I unties Lodestone and Cæsar, and pilgrims down to Stonewall's abode. Magpie is out by the packs, and he seems uh heap relieved to see me. Stonewall ain't no place in sight.

"Welcome," says Magpie. "Are yuh here in the flesh or the spirit, Ike? I was afraid that—cripes!"

He gets around on the windward side and sniffs uh couple uh times and removes his hat.

Digitized by Google

"Spirit is right!" he snorts. "Did yuh fall out of the boat?"

"Airy persiflage is uncalled for," I reproves him. "Outside uh you, Magpie, I'm the worst specimen uh blood-curdling bad man what ever entered the portals uh this here hamlet, and I runs you uh dead heat. Sabe? We're uh God-awful pair, Magpie. Where's Stonewall?"

"Stonewall's—never mind where Stonewall is, Ike. Help me put the packs on them burros and I'll tell yuh what to do."

"Now," says he, after the hitches are tied off, "you take 'em up-town where we can get at 'em handy, and then just hang around. Give me back that gun, 'cause nobody knows what's going to happen." I obeys him to the letter, and in uh few minutes I'm back in the saloon again, but this time I picks the Tammany, 'cause the bunch seems to all be there.

From the reception I gets I figures that they been telling all about me.

"Was the city marshal to home?" asks High-Card, with uh broad grin. When he grins it looks like uh skyline uh broken brown rocks. "We're all going down pretty soon and tell him that Whisperin' Wilson has done busted the law, and that he's got to arrest him. Haw! Haw! Haw!"

"HAW! haw! haw!" mimics uh squeaky voice at the door, and we all turns quick.

There stands Stonewall Jackson. He's got uh coat buttoned up tight around his neck and around his waist is uh wide strip of Injun blanket, tied in the back. In one hand he's holding uh .45 Colt and inside his blanket surcingle is that antiquated muzzle-loader six-gun.

Uh mixture of corn-juice, alkali water and copperas, and the loving influence of the angel would put nerve into anything with ambition enough to pull on uh boot, and I reckon Stonewall just barely qualifies.

He weaves in the doorway for uh minute or two, with the muzzle uh that six-gun elevated just about enough to hit uh man in the stummick, and then he sort uh shakes his head and yelps:

"The —— yuh are! Goin' to cut my ears off, eh? Bad men—hic—c-c-come to town—wh-e-e-e! Tryin' to 'timidate marshal uh Spotted Dawg, eh? Nawsir, High-Card, you better keep your hands still! What's the matter with everybody? Who's goin' to start the ball to rolling this evenin'? Take your hats off to Stonewall Jackson—hats off!"

If we'd been trained for weeks we couldn't have acted quicker.

I knowed danged well that Stonewall couldn't hit that tree, but also I was sober enough to know that I ain't no tree. High-Card and Whisperin' and Tug just stands there like three shepherds at uh funeral, and gawps at the runt. If I hadn't been right in the line uh fire I'd uh had to laugh. She's some situation.

"I just come up to—hic—shay to you alleged bad men that I'm resheptive to trouble," orates Stonewall. "I'm uh bad man from Bitter Crick—me—Stonewall Jackson! Sabe? That's good! Now you can put on your hats."

The blame fool lowers his gun and that bunch comes back to life. High-Card's hat drifts to the floor and his gun comes out smoking. He ain't more than ten feet from the runt, and he empties his gun square at the poor little devil.

She fogs things up considerable, but when the breeze thins the smoke away, there stands Stonewall as good as new.

"My —— He's uh ghost!" howls High-Card, and then Whisperin's gun begins to spread disaster over the carcass of Stonewall Jackson.

About this time the runt discovers that he's holding uh gun, so he grasps it in both hands and starts walking toward us and hell is out fer recess. She's some convention. In order to git out of the line uh lead I starts to vault the bar. My hands slip off as my feet goes over, and I lands so deep into uh spittoon that I can't get loose, and the wild waves trickle into my eyes, nose and ears. I tries to swim but I immediate and soon drifts on to the rocks, with the result that I turns over, fills and sinks all at the same time.

I can hear the breakers gurgling over the reefs, and when I tries to come to the surface for uh little air, I soon finds that I'm chased by uh man-eating shark, which bites me on the wrist and steps on that sore toe.

By natural instinct I'm of uh peaceful disposition. The Harper tribe is noted for being home-loving, simple tillers uh soil, but, by the muddy Milk River, even uh jack-rabbit will fight when it's hurt so it can't seem to reason.

I takes uh blind but hearty swipe at that

Digitized by Google

shark and my fist bounces off that bar so hard that she almost unhooks from my wrist. We goes down in uh whirlpool, and then I discovered that I'm fighting two sharks.

I'm just about to resign myself to fate when I discovers that said sharks are fighting over their prey, so I paddles to the surface and has uh look.

It's Tug Tilton and the bartender, and they're sure going some. They gits to their feet, weaves for uh second and then Tug kicks the hooch-handler under the chin, the same uh which would have lifted the roof off uh house.

Tug weaves over and leans again' the table. He looks like the slim end uh nothing whittled to uh point and his eyes are blank like uh mud-bank. He looks me over sad like and shakes his head.

"I-I-I-I always said I'd die for uh principle," he mumbles. "And I guess I have, I must uh died with that boat on my mind, 'cause it's uh cinch they don't have divers in cow-land."

He reaches over to see if I'm alive, and uh course he has to bring his big feet along and step on my corn.

I leaned down and felt of his pulse and found it all right. Just uh little slow but safe. Then I swung with all my might. I danged near busted my knuckles. I lays him down beside the bartender, and repeats uh few words which can be found in the Bible, but what I said wasn't uh direct quotation. Then I starts out to find things.

There seems to be plenty of confusion outside. Being of uh peaceful disposition, I listens until I finds that it's mostly out in front, and then I goes out the back door. At least I tried to go out. As I unhooks the latch uh piledriver hits me in the wishbone and I goes right back to the center of the saloon once more.

When I awakes I finds that High-Card is setting beside me. He looks like he'd lost everything in his system except the scare part.

We stares into each other's eyes for uh couple uh weeks, and then he shoves his six-shooter into my face and snaps it twice. Life to me ain't worth uh tinker's damn noways, so I don't even blink. He stares at me and then at the gun.

"Funny thing," sez he, offhand like, and tosses the gun away.

Uh course he couldn't possibly have throwed it at anything except that sore foot uh mine.

I goes out uh my way to walk the full length uh his lean carcass, and this time I goes out of the door without mishap.

The magpies is still singing and the sun is setting, but there ain't uh whole lot uh Springtime in my soul. I limps out into the main street and finds her deserted.

Over by the rack stands Lodestone and Cæsar, slapping flies with their ears, but Spotted Dog seems to be taking uh siesta.

"Maybe she's dead instead uh sleeping," says I to myself. There's one thing yuh can always give the Harper tribe credit for—they looks on the bright side uh things.

"I'm going to get them jacks and go far, far away from here," says I, still talking to me. "Never again do I mix up in things. If I ever sees uh yacht in uh desert I'm just going to pray for the souls uh men who go down to the desert in ships, and let her go as she lies. From now on I'm meek and mild and uh little child can lead me."

I'M ALMOST over to them jacks when uh bullet cuts right past my ear and plunks into uh barrel beside me. I don't even turn my head. What's one bullet more or less, anyway. I just turns, sort uh careless like, to see what it hit, and I finds myself looking down the muzzle of that five-cylindered relic. Stonewall's eyes are as big as saucers, and he's holding that smoke-box in both hands. There's just about five feet between me and sudden death.

He ain't the meek-looking Stonewall I used to know. This one has got the wisdom and fright of ages in his face, and also the eyes of uh killer who kills 'cause he's too danged scared to quit.

"You—you—you—huh——" he whispers, like the croak of uh frog, and then I sees his trigger finger turn white.

Bing! Bang! Fiz-z-z-, Bang! Boom!

I stands there, foolish like, and tries to count the shots. I opines that I'm too dead to skin so what's the use of getting scared, but it seems funny that I can't feel the shock uh them bullets. Uh gun that size ought at least make uh feller flinch. Stonewall and me is surrounded with smoke for uh while, and when it drifts away on the breeze we're both on our feet.

Stonewall has got streaks uh powder grease across his face, and over one eye is

Digitized by Google

uh furrow where something has plowed. He looks at me in uh dazed sort of uh way, and then at the gun on the ground. He picks it up, inspects it minute like, tosses it down and rubs his sore head.

"Cylinder didn't set right," he states, tired like. "Blocked the slugs and they all come out the breech."

"Uh-huh," I admits. "One good turn deserves another."

And I kicks that locoed runt right in the wishbone.

Did I say uh while ago that from now on I'm full uh peace and quietude? Good resolutions with me is like my money—I can't keep 'em. Never before did I kick an animal that didn't spring uh little and give my foot uh chance, but Stonewall's wishbone is like the rock of Gibraltar. My right foot is the sore one, and I never thought to kick with my left.

Stonewall looks at me, reproving like, and sets down on uh barrel. I leans against the building and chaws both ends off my mustache while I holds my foot in my hands.

"Hee-e-e-e haw-w-w-w-w!" sings Lodestone, over at the rack, and I sort uh come back to life.

I puts my left heel against Stonewall's nose and pushes hard, and the last I ever saw of him was his two boots sticking over the top of that barrel. They didn't even wave. I reckon he's so near all in that he can't even wiggle his toes.

I unties the burros and pints 'em out the way we came. Here we goes out of Spotted Dog; Lodestone in the lead, then comes Cæsar and then Ike Harper, limping along with uh gun in one hand and his hat in the other. Some caravan!

About half uh mile them jacks stops sudden like and I looks up. There stands Magpie Simpkins. I'd plumb forgot that such uh person existed. He takes one long look at me and rolls in the dust. He sets there and whoops until the tears runs down his long nose and mingles with the desert sands.

"Haw! Haw! Haw-w-w-w!" he howls. "Ike, you—haw, haw, haw—danged old pelican, you! Take that—haw, haw, haw—spittoon off your head! Haw! Haw! Haw!"

"Haw!" says I, sort uh mimicking like, and pries the blamed thing loose to the certain loss of half my hair.

Now I know what Tug meant by "diver."

"Going to shoot something with that gun?" asks Magpie, after the operation is over.

I slings that muzzle-loader off into the greasewood, sets down and rolls uh smoke. I hauls out that two hundred and eighty-seven dollars and splits it fifty-fifty with Magpie.

"Lodestone ain't such uh bad prospector after all, Ike," orates Magpie, counting his half, with uh grin.

I rubs my head and removes some of the stains uh conflict off my face with my sleeve.

"Stonewall Jackson," sez I. "He didn't kill nobody did he, Magpie?" and Magpie grins and inhales deep on his cigaret.

"Nope. I loaded his shells with dough. I knowed that his old muzzle-loader wouldn't hit nobody but the person what fired it. I gave him uh pint uh diluted alcohol and uh talk on the glories of married life and he done the rest. Let's git uh-going, Ike. It's almost dark and I feels the gnawing pains uh hunger."

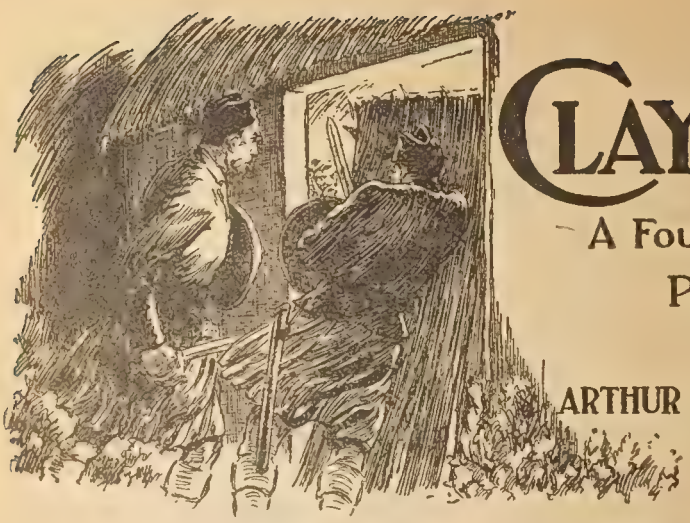
We pilgrims along down the trail for uh while, and then I turns and remarks:

"Magpie, it's funny that some uh them dead shots didn't kill that little runt. They sure had plenty uh chances to fill his carcass with lead. I don't sabe it uh tall —me."

"Preparedness covers uh lot of deliberate intentions, Ike. Yuh see, them bad, bad men are dead shots—heart shots, so I anticipated their ability and put four cast-iron stove lids inside of Stonewall's shirt. That's why he was wearing that blanket girdle—to hold them up. Sabe?"

"That's what I'd call iron nerve," says I, and we swings off the trail to uh waterhole.

Digitized by Google



CLAYMORE

A Four-Part Story

PART II.

by

ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH

Author of "Fair Salvage," "Contraband Matrimony," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

"A LOST cause, lad, is no starting-point for a successful career," argued my good uncle.

But to me the Stuart cause seemed far from lost. I was intent upon joining the army of Prince Charles Edward Stuart who had won all Scotland and was now in the heart of England.

My wishes finally prevailed and I, Francis Chisholm, of Chisholm Castle in Suffolk, twenty-two years of age, rode out across hostile England to throw in my lot with Prince Charles. The long ride to Derby was pleasantly broken by the company of one Robert Sawtelle, a chance acquaintance of about my own age.

In Derby, I called out sharply to a slim lad in Highland kilts to learn the way, but he refused to answer. I grabbed his shoulder and promised him a whipping for his discourtesy. Instantly he was at me with a dirk and I gripped his youthful wrist just in time.

At that minute a tall brawny Scotchman came running across the street with claymore drawn. But, strangely enough, the young lad called out:

"Do not be hitting at the Englishman, David. He means no harm."

"Are ye haudin' our young leddy?" asked the gigantic David of me fiercely.

"What young lady?" I asked, puzzled.

He pointed to my young captive.

"Are you a woman?" I asked blankly.

"Yes," was the startling reply.

This young girl was a Miss MacRoss, head of a Scottish clan, and David was one of her clansmen.

I rode on to the Prince's headquarters and my uncle's friend, Sir Thomas Sheridan, took me to the council chamber where sat Prince Charles and his advisers.

"A recruit, your Royal Highness," cried Sheridan.

"'Sblood but you are welcome!" said the Prince. Then turning to a commanding man of about fifty he continued: "I hope, Lord George, that this will convince those of you who doubt, that we do not lack loyal supporters in England."

But Lord George, turning to me, replied:

"We have marched to within one hundred and twenty-seven miles of London but we have received none of the help promised us. There are no more than six thousand of us, mostly Scots. His Royal Highness thinks we should march straight upon London. But we Scots feel that the risk is too great. Once defeated, we could never cut our way north and with us would die the Stuart cause. We deem it best to retire to Scotland now and await a more favorable time to strike at London."

At length the judgment of Lord George prevailed, and the Prince gave instructions for the retreat to start before daybreak.

Headquarters was so crowded that I made a bedroom of an unoccupied anteroom by the entrance. In the night I was awakened by a voice saying:

"We will put the prisoner in here. He will be quite safe."

The door was opened and the prisoner pushed inside. Before I could speak the door was shut again. I silently made a light and recognized Sawtelle, my companion of the road.

"My plight is desperate," he said soberly. "I am an officer of the King, within your lines, out of uniform."

"But you have not gained information such as you sought?" I pressed.

"No, but your commander would not believe it."

"I believe you," I returned. "I shall help you."

Adjoining the room was a small closet with a window. I pointed to it and said:

"There is your chance. I can not be party to your escape. I shall close this door and leave you."

An instant later I was snoring heavily. Then the door was thrown open and a light glared in my face. There stood the Prince and a Highlander.

"'Tis Mr. Chisholm. Zounds, Mr. MacRoss,

Digitized by Google

you have laid by the heels my own aide-de-camp," exclaimed Prince Charles.

But this MacRoss was not my friend David of the ready claymore. Presently I learned that he was known as the Master of Gairloch.

'This is not the man I put in here," protested the Master. Then turning to me: "Heard you nothing a few minutes ago?"

"I have been asleep," I answered truthfully.

The Prince turned to the door of the closet and wrenched it open.

"'Swoons, Gairloch, that way flew your prisoner," he cried amusedly and pointed to the open window. "'Tis no matter," went on the Prince, "I am not sorry to be able to avoid sentencing one of my own countrymen to death."

After the Master had gone the Prince turned to me. "There's a man I can not fathom," he said with a shudder. "If he tastes blood he will not be satisfied."

"Is he chief of the MacRosses, sir?" I asked, recalling the young lady I had mistaken for a boy.

"Although the Master is a MacRoss," replied the Prince, "the titular chief of the MacRosses is a slip of a girl who insists upon riding at the head of her wild clansmen—and who is one of the boldest campaigners in our army. Some generations since there was a split in the ranks of the MacRosses. But the real head is the lassie."

Early next morning the retreat was begun. The Prince beckoned me to him and said:

"You are now Captain Chisholm. When we reach Scotland you shall have a commission in regular order. I am lending you to Lord George."

Lord George ordered me to ride and find the Clan Ross—either Miss MacRoss, the chief, or Ian Dhu MacRoss, captain of the clan.

"They are to have the post of guarding the rear," said he. "'Tis an hereditary right they claim."

I found the MacRosses by finding the gigantic David. Presently a gray-haired man with the manner of a warrior appeared. "My father," explained David. "He will be the captain."

I delivered the message and an "aye" was his sole acknowledgment.

A second regiment of Highlanders appeared, led by the Master of Gairloch. The Master left the line and came to my side.

"Why did you not come to me with His Highness's order?" he asked.

"Because yours is not the Clan Ross," I answered.

"Sir!" His claymore was half out of the sheath but in a second he thrust it back. "Know, sir, that when you are instructed to carry orders to the Clan Ross you are to come to me."

"There has been no mistake," I answered, "my instructions were to carry orders to Miss MacRoss, chief of the Clan Ross." His face flushed purple.

"I shall not forget you, Englishman," he said as he left. "You shall feel my sword!"

As I turned, Miss MacRoss and old Ian Dhu MacRoss were standing at one side.

"Now you are our friend," she said. "You have humbled the Master of Gairloch and risked his enmity. There is not one of our clan, Mr. Chisholm, but will hold you brother for your act."

I spoke of the prospect of a duel with Gairloch.

"You must not fight him," she cried. "He is not a clean fighter. You must be very careful with an enemy like the Master. You shall have one of my own gillies, as servant, who can protect your back at night."

As we retreated, the populace, never cordial, became openly hostile. The feeling against the Highlanders was almost unbelievable.

From time to time I learned more of the feud between the Ross clans. One day Miss MacRoss told me of the fate of her father.

"We found him murdered, the dirk in his back," she said. "He had no enemies save the Gairlochs, but there was no proof. We have waited ever since for vengeance, but our time will come. And that is not all," she went on and eyed me half askance, "this Summer they were for arranging that I should wed with the Master."

The hot anger welled up in me so fierce that I did not know myself.

CHAPTER VIII

ORDEAL BY BATTLE

'TWAS dusk when we marched into Kendal on the fifteenth, nine days after leaving Derby, but there was not time for taproom gossip—aye, or rest—for those who rode with Lord George. He borrowed a troop of the Life Guards from my Lord Elcho, and set forth upon a reconnoitering expedition to discover the whereabouts of the English army under Marshal Wade that had been in our front when we began the retreat.

We scouted for upward of an hour through quiet country lanes, in the end surprising an English picket of horse as they lolled in a farmyard. They were not loath to talk. Yes, they said, Wade was immediately behind, scarce two hours' march from the Prince's line of retreat, but he hesitated to attack without the Duke of Cumberland to help him.

"A pox on these English generals," muttered Lord George. "They must be pried into fighting, 'twould seem."

He gave orders for the securing of the prisoners, and we rode back to Kendal, rocking in our saddles for weariness.

At my quarters in the village, I would have turned out of the column, but Lord George stayed me.

"Come with me, Chisholm," he said. "I go to touch up young Don Furioso."

"Who, sir?" I asked, in some amazement.

He laughed.

Digitized by Google

"Who but our gracious Prince? Do not be led astray by the mummery of the crowd of sycophants who surround him. A prince, Chisholm, is but a man, and if he be twenty-four, say, he has the wit of twenty-four. Prince Charles is my sovereign, and I respect him as such, but I have more confidence in your opinion on military questions than on his."

This gave me food for thought. In the brief time I had known them I had conceived an enthusiastic admiration for both of these men, so widely different in temperament, in age and in training, and yet so uniformly kindly to me, and each in his own way, capable of such true heroism of soul. It was painful to realize the sad difficulties that were brewing betwixt them, but what could I say?

I rode on in silence, and for the first time a foreboding of failure blanketed my spirits.

We found the Prince playing at piquet with Sir Thomas Sheridan and several other officers, including the notorious "Parson" Kelly, a blue-eyed giant, who, when a clergyman, had been exiled from England for participation in Atterbury's plot after the Fifteen. They had all been drinking and were flushed with wine.

"An unusual honor, 'pon my soul," Prince Charles welcomed us. "My lord, you and your faithful aide are but seldom visible these days."

"There is work to be done, your Royal Highness," replied Lord George with a faint smile.

"Work? This is not the hour to mention work. Let us forget that there is such a thing, against the morrow's wakening."

The toadies about him laughed loudly at this quip.

"This Madeira is not half bad," continued the prince. "A glass with you gentlemen?"

"I thank you, your Royal Highness, no," said Lord George. "We have not eaten yet."

"Not eaten? Where aplague have you been with my Lord Elcho's men?"

"Are you still of a mind for a battle?" returned Lord George abruptly, as if he had not heard the Prince's question.

"What do you mean?"

"Well," said Lord George deliberately, "your Royal Highness has been recommending a battle for many days past and finding fault with me because I opposed your wish. Now, I can offer you a battle within the space of three hours."

"Where? With whom?"

"With Marshal Wade, who lies but a couple of miles from here and is ignorant of our arrival, unless I mistake."

The Prince looked embarrassed.

"I scarcely know what to say," he replied at last. "The question is one——"

"It seems to me 'twould be madness for his Royal Highness to offer battle at this stage," interrupted Sir Thomas Sheridan. "Our infantry are foot-sore and worn out. Sure, 'twere criminal folly to risk the safety of our retreat now that we have pressed it so far."

Lord George shrugged his shoulders.

"I am not arguing that point, Sir Thomas," he said coldly. "I am simply placing before his Royal Highness the alternative of fighting or continuing the retreat."

At this everybody in the room looked to the Prince, whose discomfort was very apparent.

"I—I can not make so important a decision upon such short notice," he said in some fluster. "But I agree with Sir Thomas. I can see no desirable policy to be achieved by abandoning our retreat at this time."

"So be it," assented Lord George. "I but wished to place the decision in your Royal Highness's hands."

He made a low bow, first to the Prince, then to the company.

"Sir," he said, "I have your permission to retire? Gentlemen, your servant."

And he backed to the door, formal as if it had been at a levee, leaving the Prince red-faced and sullen and the breach betwixt them wider than ever. Outside in the street, as we took the bridles of our tired horses from the guardsmen who had held them, he laughed bitterly.

"You see, Chisholm?" he said. "Princes are even as other men—only more easily led astray."

THE army left Kendal the next morning, and the main body reached Shap that night, being now well ahead of Marshal Wade and with a clear road to the Scotch border. But the artillery train was mired a few miles out of Kendal, and despite the utmost efforts of the rear-guard 'twas impossible to gain Shap. We spent the night in a pouring rain-storm under what shelter the wagons and the roadside hedges could afford.

Digitized by Google

The MacRosses kindled fires in the road, which they contrived to keep alight in some fashion of their own, and 'twas beside one of these that I found Sheila MacRoss, wrapped in a large plaid and eating a badly burned oaten cake, serenely unconscious of the rain that glistened on her hair and the smoke that blew into her eyes.

"You'll be in good time," said she. "Be seated, and you shall have a bit of a bannock and a sip of whisky. 'Twill be better fare than the weather."

"I doubt not," said I. "But you are to come with me."

She wrapped herself the tighter in her plaid.

"David," said she to her giant lieutenant, "pile the brands nearer my brogues." And to me: "Indeed? Who sends for me?"

Now, I had prepared for her a warm bed in one of the few covered baggage wagons we carried with us, but I realized that my urgings would be of no avail. So I had recourse to strategy—by which I mean lying.

"Lord George has sent for you," I said, and dropped carelessly by her side.

David gave me a look at this, for he had just come from the general. But I winked at him, and a light of humor crept into his eyes. He was not a bad sort, my one-time enemy, David. Slow-witted, as became so big a body, but wondrous patient and steady.

"Oh, dear," said my victim. "And just when I was comfortable! David, why could not you have attended to it?"

"It wull be naething I ken o'," he retorted, crunching his own bannock.

This negative confirmation of my statement served to convince her, and grumbling, she followed me to where Lord George was ensconced under a wagon, with nought but planks 'twixt himself and the mud.

"Ah, a pleasant visit," he cried, looking up from the dispatch he was writing to the Prince, describing our plight. "Come in out of the rain, Miss MacRoss."

"I have brought Miss MacRoss," I hastened to explain, lest she discern my trick, "as you suggested, so that she might have proper shelter for the night."

"Certes," he exclaimed. "I was nigh to forgetting. I am glad you remembered it, Captain Chisholm."

"But I will be wanting no place," she returned vigorously. "I am used to sleeping on the mountains in the wet, and I must be with my clan."

"Is this the way to talk to your general?" demanded Lord George with mock severity.

And on the heels of that he rattled off something in the Gaelic that put her in an instant good humor.

"Will you just let me finish my dispatch?" he added. "And then you shall——"

"But," I interpolated, "I forgot to tell you, sir, that I found the place you directed me to procure for Miss MacRoss."

"Did you, indeed?" Lord George smiled upon me as if I had captured a regiment. "Miss MacRoss, he is become a paragon, my young Englishman. Shall I permit him to lead you to your bower?"

"But I will not be wanting to have shelter when my clan are in the wet," she protested. "Sure, and you——"

"Captain Chisholm," said Lord George, "conduct Miss MacRoss to her quarters. Not another word, ma'am. Not a word, or I put you under arrest."

Miss MacRoss dimpled prettily. And how she kept flesh on her bones, with the privations and exertions she supported—no less were they than those of the hardiest Highlander—I do not know.

"I will be kenning now why some men say you are a hard master, my lord," she declared, saucy as you please.

But outside the wagon I had prepared for her, she put her hand on my arm.

"Do not be thinking you have fooled me, Captain Chisholm," says she. "If you had done it any other wise, I would not have come; but you are a friend I may be proud to owe favors to."

With that she was gone, and I was left staring, until a rain-drop splashing into my eye brought me to my senses.

At daylight we resumed our march through ever-deepening mud, and managed to reach Shap ere nightfall. Meantime the army had reached Penrith and lay there awaiting us.

The morning of December the seventeenth we started early again, hoping to get into Penrith before dark. But 'twas not yet noon when parties of the enemy's light horse appeared around us, never coming within musket-shot, yet remaining sufficiently close to be an active menace.

After several hours of this, they vanished, and we started to breast a high hill, the last considerable obstacle in our path. Judge of our consternation, when, as we were half-way

Digitized by Google

up the ascent, we spied a long column of the light horse defiling along the crest, whilst from behind them echoed a burst of trumpets and kettledrums such as might herald the advance of an army.

"My God!" exclaimed Lord George. "The English are between us and the Prince."

There was but one hope for us, and we all knew it. The officer in command of the advance companies of the artillery train ordered his men to proceed up the road at the double and try to cut a path through any opposition they met at the top. Lord George ordered the MacRosses to do the same, but the narrowness of the road, all choked with vehicles, prevented them from using it, and instead they climbed over the hedges on either side, and ran through the open fields, outstripping the artillerymen.

Lord George and I rode with Miss MacRoss, and 'twas an object lesson for me to see those nimble Highlanders scale the hill more rapidly than our horses. We rallied our men in some sort of order under the brow, and then swept over, expecting to face the fire of an army. All we saw was a frightened array of the light horse, some three or four hundred of them. They fired a few pistols at us, and galloped off before we could give them a volley.

"A ruse to turn us from the direct road," was Lord George's verdict on the skirmish. "We must be careful from now on. There is something toward in the enemy's camp—and we are a tempting bait."

About an hour later a wagon broke down, and despairing of fixing it, I took a party of men to a near-by farm to procure a wagon to take its place. This, with the transfer of the load, occupied another hour, and as we were about to start Miss MacRoss called my attention to a prodigious column of horsemen crossing the hills to our left. David's keen eyes made them out to be dragoons, each horseman carrying a footman behind him. As near as we could count them hastily, there were four thousand men in this body. We of the rear-guard were not five hundred.

Lord George had pushed ahead some minutes before, seeking to establish communications with our outposts near Penrith, now a bare league distant. Ian Dhu and David were tried warriors and fighting men, but this work of guarding a helpless, cumbersome baggage-train was novel to them and they had no tactics to suggest. Ian Dhu merely drew his claymore, swung his target over his left arm, and said:

"We wull be ready for the English."

The clansmen did the same, keeping their firelocks slung over their shoulders, and marching in close formation behind the wagons. And all this time the dragoons were closing up on us. They had dropped the footmen, and were pounding toward us at a hard gallop.

The situation was somewhat peculiar, in that the road was narrow and lined by ditches and hedges, whilst the countryside about us was much cut up in the same fashion, so that the only way for the enemy to attack us on horseback was along the road. I saw this, and in the same breath there flashed through my mind Lord George's precept:

"Always attack, even though the odds be against you."

THERE, if ever, was a case for attacking. I turned to Sheila MacRoss, riding beside me, with a slight frown wrinkling her forehead. She cared nothing for herself, but she dreaded to think of her clansmen being ridden down beneath those iron-shod hoofs that already filled our ears with their clatter.

"I represent Lord George here," I said. "May I take over command of your clan?"

Without a second's hesitation she called out to Ian Dhu:

"Foster-father, Captain Chisholm will be commanding in Lord George's stead. Take his orders."

Ian Dhu gave me one look—it might have been surprise; it might have been resentment—from his steely-blue eyes. Then he nodded. The word of the chief was law to every dunniewassel, tackman and gillie of Clan Ross.

"About face," I shouted.

Ian Dhu repeated the order in Gaelic. I slipped off my horse and passed the bridle to Miss MacRoss.

"Now," said I, addressing myself particularly to Ian Dhu and David, "we will shake the hearts out of those dragoons. They think they are attacking us, but instead we will attack them. Fire when I give the word, then—Claymore!"

"Claymore!" roared the clan, quick in response; and the blood pulsed fast through my veins. Here was what I had dreamed of

Digitized by Google

all my boyhood—here was I, Francis Chisholm, leading five hundred of the bravest fighting men that ever drew sword into battle against desperate odds!

But there was no time for dreams in that moment. Round a bend of the road came the dragoons, sabers waving over head. We ran toward them, and as I had expected, the leading horsemen checked their pace; but the mass behind shoved them on.

At twenty paces distance we poured in a volley, then attacked with the claymore, the Highlanders cleverly slashing at the horses, which made the beasts frantic and unmanageable and threw the enemy's ranks into disorder. They reeled back, turned and fled. We snatched up our muskets, and ran after our wagons.

A hundred yards along the road we rested, whilst the wagons proceeded, and waited for the dragoons to try us again. They were not slow to do so. Maddened by their losses and the humiliation of having been dispersed by footmen in full charge, they stormed down upon us, reckless of death.

Once more, we suffered them to come close, then gave them our fire, and charged, ourselves, claymore against saber, dirk against pistol. Horses kicked and plunged, several of the dragoons burst through our ranks by sheer pressure of weight, and for a space I thought we were beaten—and to have been beaten there would have meant annihilation. But the Highlanders were wildcats. Ridden down, they yet managed to reach up and hamstring horses with their dirks or pull riders bodily from the saddle. Their desperation was too much for the English. We closed our ranks, and the dragoons retreated.

Three other times they tried this, riding up to our fire, but each time when we charged with the claymore, they wilted and fled. They had had their lesson.

Opposite the castle of Clifton Hall, near Penrith, Lord George met us with Lochiel and his Camerons and the MacPhersons, under their chief, Cluny. The dragoons drew off, and breaking down the hedges, galloped into the castle grounds, where they were joined presently by their foot.

"Well done, Ian Dhu," said Lord George as he rode up to us. "You have taught the English horsemen they must be more than four to one if they would fight the Clan Ross on equal terms."

Ian Dhu shook his head impassively.

"'Twas himsel' made the ploy," he said, pointing at me.

"What?" Lord George looked his amazement.

"Captain Chisholm did it," cried Miss MacRoss. "Oh, you should have seen them, my lord! They charged the dragoons on foot!"

Lord George clapped me on the back.

"Bravo, Chisholm! Lad, you do honor to my teaching. You should be a knight of the field for this. 'Odsfish, I shall remember it."

A shower of musket-balls whistled overhead as he spoke.

"And unless I mistake," he went on, "there will be chances aplenty for all to show valor ere we sleep tonight. Yonder rogues have still some spirit left in them, and we dare not leave them unbroken so close to Penrith. Gentlemen, to your posts."

CHAPTER IX

I DON THE KILT AND PLAID

THE darkness had come on with all the suddenness of a North-country Winter night, but a bright moon shone through the cloud-wrack and the towers of Clifton Hall loomed gigantic above the surrounding groves and thorn hedges. The English foot and most of the dragoons, dismounted, had formed their line in the castle grounds. Their fire was high, but 'twas apparent that once they corrected the range we should stand to lose many more men than they, for our position was vastly the more exposed.

Lord George tossed his claymore in air.

"After me, MacRosses, Camerons, MacPhersons, MacDonalds!" he shouted. "I never yet asked you to go where I would not lead you! Claymore!"

"Claymore!" roared the clans, and the ground trembled beneath their rush.

Gad, but it took the heart into a man's throat! There was something of the berserker in the rush of those wild hill men, sword-hungry and untamed. Powder and ball meant little to them. They used the point and the edge.

All of the officers had dismounted, and I found myself running in the van of the MacRosses. To my right was old Ian Dhu. At my left elbow I heard the steady breathing

Digitized by Google

of a runner keeping pace with me. I turned my head. 'Twas Sheila MacRoss, claymore in hand, target on arm.

"What do you here?" I panted. "Get back! 'Tis no place for women."

"I did not give you the right to be commanding the Clan Ross all the time," says she.

I caught her arm.

"Do you come with me," I directed. "We will drop out, and I will find you shelter."

She wrenched herself away.

"Don't be handling me!" Her eyes flashed. "Would you be fearing the English, yourself, that you wish to drop out?"

In despair, I looked about me for David, but he was swallowed up in the turmoil of the charge.

I changed my tune.

" 'Tis not for myself I fear, as you well know," I said. "But I would not have you endangered."

"I can use a claymore as well as yourself, I'm thinking," she retorted.

There was nothing for it. I sprinted forward, and shouted in Ian Dhu's ear:

"Miss MacRoss is here."

"What for wad she not be?" he replied.

"But, man, a claymore rush is no place for her!"

He gave me a brief, satirical look out of the corner of his eye.

"Hoot, the clan wull see that no harrm comes to hersel'. Wha' wad a chief be, but wi' her clan?"

I was baffled. They were all mad, I decided, as I dropped back to her side.

We ran on together, but I did not speak to her again and once when I would have helped her over a ditch she swerved away and leaped it unaided in her stride. At the last we crossed a road and came to a thorn hedge, a prickly wall six feet high and impenetrably thick, from behind which the English were shooting at us with the worst marksmanship ever I did see, for we were right in their front and had they but pointed their muskets we must have lost heavily.

"Out dirks!" cried Lord George. "Chop me a path, lads."

Dirks and claymores made short work of those noble bushes, and the clans poured through a score of openings before the English realized what we were about. The gap hacked by the MacRosses was partly blocked by a fallen thorn which did painful damage to the bare knees of the Highlanders in front of me. I knew that Miss MacRoss would suffer no less than they, and so, without stopping to explain, I swept her into my arms as we entered the breach and carried her across the obstacle.

She gasped as I lifted her up. Then her teeth clicked with rage, and I felt her dirk sink into the fleshy part of my arm. But I held on to her and the hurt of it made me feel savagely glad.

"There, you little mountain-cat," I said, when I put her down. "Look on your whole knees and think shame of yourself."

She glared at me, the tears fringing her long lashes, and her eyes dropped. But that was no time for bickering. The red-coated English line was not ten paces distant; the foremost Highlanders were striking at the soldiers' bayonets. Ian Dhu called an order in the Gaelic, and a score of the biggest men of the clan crowded around her, shutting her off inside a barrier of unselfish flesh and loyal steel.

After that everything was too confused for recollection. We had caught the English with their muskets unloaded, for they had just fired a volley as we came through the hedge and were recharging their pieces. The clansmen swept over them in waves, turning their bayonets on the targets which the Highlanders carried on the left arm, and hewing them down in their ranks—aye, by whole platoons. They stood to it. There is that to be said for the Redcoats. They fell in batches of forty and fifty at once before the deadly claymores, but they did not run until their officers gave the word.

'Twas warm work while it lasted. I found myself jammed against a line of tall grenadiers, one of whom jabbed at me with his bayonet. I turned his point mechanically, never thinking of following up the stroke, but a Highlander beside me took advantage of his preoccupation to lay his head open.

THE next thing I remember the English were giving way, and suddenly with a great shout the clans broke the hostile ranks and the castle grounds were covered with pelting crowds of fugitives and pursuers. In the excitement of the moment our people lost what little idea of discipline they had and scattered, every man for himself in the hunt for

Digitized by Google

prisoners and plunder. As I hurried forward to collect the MacRosses in some sort of order, I caught up with a stout-built, blond young fellow of about mine own age, dressed in a red coat, with a star on his breast.

"Stand there!" I called.

He answered by snapping a pistol in my face. Mercifully, the ball went just past my ear, but the noise of the discharge and the smoke confused me. When I saw him again he was clambering on to his horse.

I ran toward him, my pistol in hand.

"Stand or I fire!" I cried.

He hesitated, and I presented the pistol; but when I would have fired it I found the flint had fallen out in the mêlée.

The Englishman laughed in my face and struck spurs to his horse. I rushed at him, still hoping to cut him down, and I think I might have succeeded, had it not been for a stolid-faced fellow in livery, who came from the other side of the Englishman's horse and butted me out of his path. That was enough for Redcoat. He jumped his horse over the nearest hedge and was off across the open fields.

In my resentment I was about to run through the footman who had come to his assistance, but the knave dropped on his knees and pleaded for mercy.

"Sure, sir," he said, "you would not have me desert my master."

The unselfishness of his argument took my fancy.

"Go to," said I, "you are a faithful servant. Who is your master?"

He looked uncomfortable.

"Must I answer?" he asked.

"Aye, indeed," said I, growing stern. "Or——"

I raised my sword threateningly.

"Oh, I will tell," he hastened to assure me. "'Twas his Royal Highness."

"His Royal Highness? Who do you mean?"

"The Duke of Cumberland, sir."

I dashed my sword upon the ground. 'Sdeath, what luck! To have had the arch-fiend, himself, in my power! But 'twas useless bemoaning a loose flint and its consequences. I summoned a couple of Highlanders to guard the prisoner closely, and resumed my search for the MacRosses.

Near the edge of the battlefield I met Ian Dhu and David searching for the MacRoss pipers to raise the clan rally. They had not seen Miss MacRoss since the English ranks were broken.

"Nae doubt she wull be about the same havers as oursel's," said David. "There's a handfu' o' seelly loons wishfu' to be smathered by the dragoons. Gie 'em a worrd to bide, if ye see their likes, Chisholm."

I promised him I would, and passed on. The sky for the moment was overcast. But though figures were indistinct, I could make out the English retiring slowly across an open heath beyond the castle enclosure, under cover of their cavalry. After them ran David's "handfu' o' seelly loons," reckless fellows carried away by the intoxication of victory and now fair game for the sabers of the dragoons. I was wondering what I could do to save these men, when the moon shone forth from behind the mists, and the breath stopped in my throat as I glimpsed the slim, lithe figure that was leading them.

There was no time to summon help. The dragoons already were charging upon the Highlanders from two sides, keen to retrieve some consolation for the disgrace of their defeat. Without any plan in my head, I began to run. That seemed to be all that I could do—run. In the eye of my mind I saw Sheila MacRoss, battered by iron hoofs, cleft by the curved saber-blades—and I ran faster.

I was scarce an hundred yards out upon the heath, when the moon was obscured again and 'twas as if a curtain had been dropped across a stage. Through the darkness the blast of a dragoon trumpet reached my ears, the shock of the squadron's gallop, a fierce outburst of shouting and the clash of steel.

God! Was I too late?

My tongue lolled between cracked lips. I stumbled on, trying desperately to think of a plan, of something definite that I might do. Then out of the shadows reeled a horseman, drooping in his saddle, a dirk planted in his heart.

Here was my chance. Utterly remorseless, I pitched the dead man from his seat, mounted and drove headlong into the fight.

"MacRoss!" I shouted. "MacRoss! Prince Charles! Prince Charles!"

The dragoons, paltry fellows at best, thought a whole troop had struck them, for the darkness veiled their eyes. They fled in mad terror, even as I clove through them and found myself in the midst of the

Digitized by Google

errant clansmen, Sheila MacRoss, her bonnet all awry and her claymore bloodied, standing to the fore.

"I thought you would be coming," she said simply, as I leaned down to make sure she was unhurt.

"You thought——"

My jaw gaped.

"Aye," she nodded, "you would not be the kind to desert a friend in trouble of her own making."

She was as contrite as a child—she, with the blood still dripping from her blade.

"There'll be time for talk anon," I said as shortly as I could—for my ire trickled out at the sight of her. "Up with you."

She took my hand meekly enough, set her foot on my toe and leaped to the saddle before me.

"For the rest of you, back to your regiments," I said to the clansmen. "Let not your chiefs know you have been guilty of this foolishness. Make haste! A clean pair of heels will help the quickest of you."

Ere I had ceased speaking there was not one of them left, and we galloped across the heath to the castle by ourselves, praying that the moon would stay hid until we had won to safety.

"Where got you this idiocy?" I rasped after I had fully caught my breath.

She twisted around closer against my arm.

"I was sore in my heart that I had given you the insult in my wicked passion," she said haltingly.

I was near to being placated by this, but I pretended to a great rage.

"What mean you?"

"Why—why—sure, I said you were afraid, and it was a black lie."

"It was not true," I agreed. "What then?"

She looked up at me shyly from under her lashes.

"Could I say worse to a friend?"

"Perhaps not. But what meant you by running off on this wild-goose chase?"

SHE was silent. We rode on so for several minutes, I growing weaker with every second.

"Well?" I said finally, making a gruffness of voice that I did not feel.

"I—I—was so ashamed—I—I—did not care—what happened—I just ran and ran—and I hoped the English would kill me. But—when they came around us—I—I—hoped you would come for me—and I wanted to live."

"Umph," I cleared my throat.

"Will you forgive me?" This almost in a whisper.

"Yes," I said again very gruff. "But you must not do it again."

"I will not," she promised docilely.

We were close to Clifton Hall now, and the moon peeped out. She sighed, and was very content.

But I remembered the dragoons' hoofs and sabers, and I shuddered.

"Are you cold?" she asked.

"Nay, I was but thinking of—of what might have been. Where got you the blood on your claymore?"

"Oh, I did not kill him," she answered composedly. "I struck him on the arm as he raised his sword at me, and he cursed—beautifully."

She laughed at the memory.

"He had long mustachios, too," she added, gravely childlike. "I do not like long mustachios in a man. Do you?"

"Not overly much," I assented, for as yet I had achieved no success with the hair on my upper lip.

"Will you tell on me?" she asked suddenly.

"Tell on you?"

"Aye. I would take it kindly of you if you did not tell Ian Dhu. He would be angered at me if he heard I had left the clan and gone with MacGregors and other landless men and caterans."

"Were they such that you were with?"

She hid her face.

"And you the chief of your clan!" I said severely.

A sob wrenched her body, and I near fell from the horse.

"Don't cry," I begged in terror. "Indeed, and I will do anything you ask of me, Sheila."

With that she smiled up at me, sunny through her tears.

"And if you will call me that, instead of your stiff 'Miss MacRoss this' and 'Miss MacRoss that,' I will promise never to cry again," says she.

"I will promise—anything at all, if only you will not cry."

"And you will not be telling on me to Ian Dhu?"

"Not a word."

Digitized by Google

"You will be a true friend, I can see," says she.

And as she spoke, she shifted her weight involuntarily against my other arm that she had put her dirk into as we passed the thorn hedge. The pain that stabbed me made the night seem shot with lightning bolts and dancing stars, and I toppled in my saddle. Her arms were round me in a trice, and she held me upright, panic-struck with terror.

"What is it, Frank?" she cried. "You will be wounded?"

I gritted my teeth and fought my way back to self-control, but she passed her hands rapidly over my arm and felt the blood that had congealed the coat-sleeve so that it stuck to the wound in a soggy mass.

"'Tis blood," she gasped. "On your arm, Frank!"

And with that she burst into a storm of weeping.

"Oh, but I will be the wicked girl!" she sobbed. "'Tis I who stabbed you, and you will have gone all the evening with never a word, and rescued me from my own foolishness! Oh, I wish I were dead!"

"Nay, 'tis of no account, Sheila," I pleaded. "I had forgotten it."

"Aye, because you are unselfish. But do you think I will ever be forgetting it, and you the true friend you have been to me!"

"Why," said I, desperately casting about for a word that would comfort her, "'twill be no more than a memory of how we came to a real knowledge of each other—a pledge of friendship, as it were. And what truer bond of friendship could there be than a drop or two of blood?"

"You will be always generous to me," she said chokingly. "But 'tis no drop of blood that has soaked your whole sleeve."

"Well, you shall bandage it for me. Will that make amends?"

"I will not be able to make up to you for it so easy as that," she returned. "But at the least I will do all that I may."

"This is the long end of it, then," I declared. "Shall we handfast on it?"

She gave me her hand very solemnly, the tears still staining her cheeks.

"You will be needing a new coat," she remarked, after a while.

"Yes," said I, unthinkingly.

"I would be gey proud if you would take the plaid and kilt," she suggested wistfully. "You would be no disgrace to the MacRoss tartan, I ken."

The idea appealed to me on more than one ground. Practically all the officers of our army had adopted the Highland costume. Moreover, the suit in which I had set out from Chisholm Castle was sadly frayed and worn by the rough experiences of the road.

"Find me the clothes, and I will wear them," I answered, laughing. "Certes, any garments would be more respectable than these."

A voice called to us from a camp-fire before she could reply, and as I turned into the area of light, the Clan Ross swarmed around us. Sheila slipped easily to the ground.

"Do not be asking me more questions than I can answer," she said pertly to Ian Dhu, whose grim old face still showed the anxiety his fruitless search for her had stirred. "Captain Chisholm is wounded in caring for me, and I must dress his hurt. David, do you find him a suit of Highland clothes to wear. And I would have all the gentlemen of our clan look upon him as one of themselves, for your chief will be under great obligations to him."

CHAPTER X

THE MASTER'S NEW PLAY

WITH my arm neatly bandaged by Sheila, who was much put out that I refused to carry it in a sling, and attired in the kilts and plaid, I mounted my horse again to attend Lord George. I found him conferring with Mr. Cameron of Lochiel, the grandest of all the Highland chieftains, and MacPherson of Cluny, at Clifton Hall.

"Zounds," he exclaimed, as I entered, more than a little aware of my bare knees, I will admit, "what have we here? Lochiel, know you this gentleman's clan?"

The Cameron, a big, noble-visaged man, smiled kindly upon me.

"Certes, my lord," he answered, in fair English, with a broad Scots tang, "he wears the tartan of the MacRosses of that ilk, the elder branch. But I do not recognize the gentleman."

Lord George laughed.

"I recognize him well enough," he said. "He is my whilom English aide-de-camp, Captain Chisholm—all the more valued, in

Digitized by Google

that he represents our sole accession of strength at Derby."

This last was said with bitterness, but he added quickly, as if desiring not to hurt my feelings:

"And I speak not in jest, when I say he is the most valuable officer I have about me."

"Sir, 'tis pleased I am to greet an Englishman who draws the sword for the Good Cause," said Lochiel, gripping my hand. "I would there were more of you."

"My heart is with you there, sir," I replied.

MacPherson, too, shook hands. He was by way of being more of a tricksy, gold-laced fop, after the French manner, but like all the Highland chiefs, he knew how to swing his claymore and his counsel was never despised.

"How came you by the MacRoss tartan, sir?" he asked curiously.

"Ay, Chisholm, render an account of your transformation," ordered Lord George. "My faith, you are like the creature I have heard of which changes its color from desire to conform with its surroundings."

I was at a loss to answer, for I did not desire to reveal too much, so I decided upon a frank half-truth.

"Why, my lord," said I, "as you may know, I charged with the MacRosses, and in extricating some of that clan who had rashly pursued the enemy beyond the enclosures and were like to fall victims to the dragoons, I was slightly hurt and my clothes wrecked. Therefore, they were kind enough to fit me out anew in garb of their own."

Lochiel nodded gravely.

"I suspect there is more to the tale," he declared. "'Tis somewhat of an honor for an outlander like yourself, Captain Chisholm, to be practically adopted into a clan, which is what is meant by this."

I flushed.

"Sir," I replied, "you do me too much courtesy."

And anxious to change the subject, I turned to Lord George and inquired if he had seen the footman whom I had made prisoner.

"The rogue was brought to me," he said, "and I sent him on to the Prince. Know you who he was, Chisholm?"

"Only too well, my lord," I replied shamefacedly, "as I do the chance I missed."

Then I told them of how my loose flint had saved the life of the Duke of Cumberland; and although they were careful not to seem to hold me to blame for the incident, Lochiel and Cluny plainly took it to heart, for they stated their belief that the duke's death would have put the English Court in a panic. Lord George did not agree with them.

"For myself, I am not sorry you failed, Chisholm," said he. "I doubt if the duke's death would have had more than a temporary effect. If we are to place his Royal Highness's father on the throne, 'tis to be done by defeating armies and winning friends wholesale, rather than by slaying individual men, no matter how exalted in rank. And I think you will find the Prince agrees with me in this."

So, in fact, it turned out. The Prince told me later that he did not regret his cousin's escape. What was more, he sent back the footman to the duke with a civil message—which delicacy meant nothing to a young bloodhound such as Cumberland, of course.

We had scant rest at Clifton Hall, camping on the ground for some hours until the artillery train was safe out of Penrith, when we resumed the march and entered Carlisle at seven o'clock the next morning. Here the Prince announced his intention of leaving a garrison to hold the town, against the advice of most of the Scots lords, none of whom could be induced to remain, so that finally he was obliged to select for the duty the two or three hundred recruits picked up in England and organized as the Manchester Regiment, together with a handful of French troops and artillerists.

In the midst of a driving rain-storm, we departed from Carlisle before daybreak on December the twentieth, and soaked to the skin, reached the river Esk, which forms the boundary between the two kingdoms, about two o'clock of the afternoon. Ordinarily, the river was a mild stream, but the recent heavy rain-storms had swollen it to a depth of four feet at the ford. Lord George's dispositions for crossing were made with great skill and thoroughness.

He stationed lines of horsemen, both above the ford to break the strength of the current, and below to catch any unlucky Highlanders who might lose their footing and be swept away. Then the clansmen were ordered to place their powder on their heads and sling their muskets, so that the

Digitized by Google

locks would ride high in air, and in ranks of ten or twelve, with arms joined, were marched into the water.

At a distance the ford looked like a cobbled street, full of the bobbing heads of the infantry, who crossed without the loss of a man, several who were torn from their comrades' hold, being caught by the horsemen down the river. The Prince, himself, was instrumental in saving one of these men, holding him above water, until others came and helped him ashore.

When we had all gained the opposite shore, immense fires were lighted, the pipers struck up the liveliest tunes they knew, and the Highlanders danced themselves warm and dry again in their joy at being once more upon Scottish ground. But the rain continued, and as there was no place in the vicinity large enough to support such a host as ours, we were obliged to march all night to a village called Annan, which we reached the following morning.

At this point the army was divided into two columns, one, commanded by the Prince, proceeding straight toward Glasgow, and the other, under Lord George, taking a roundabout course, which might have been construed as a threat toward any of the Lowland shires. Moffatt we entered on the twenty-third, and after that suddenly changed our direction, striking for Glasgow, where we joined the Prince on the twenty-sixth.

This city was the wealthiest and most populous of Scotland, and the Prince and his advisers had hoped that they would obtain many recruits from its citizens. On the contrary, the inhabitants turned out to be red-hot Whigs, and the hardest efforts of our recruiting sergeants netted but sixty new names on the muster-rolls.

I think that the lack of cordiality he experienced in Glasgow did more to dishearten Prince Charles than all that had gone before. He looked pale and careworn, and he was prone to divert his mind by gaming and drinking with his boon-companions—a propensity which had begun to develop during the retreat from England, but which now became still more pronounced.

Lord George returned from one of these mingled war councils and gaming bouts, held in the Prince's lodgings at the west end of the Trongate, with a serious look on his face.

"Hear you aught of his Royal Highness's newest intimate, Chisholm?" he asked.

"No, sir."

"'Tis the Master of Gairloch, a runagate knave. I like him not."

"No more do I," I returned heartily.

"Ha, you have met the fellow?"

"Yes, sir."

And I recounted my adventure with the Master at Derby.

"He never sent you a challenge?" asked Lord George with interest.

"There has been no opportunity, even had he wished to press it," I pointed out.

"True. 'Tis in my mind, Chisholm, he means no good to your friends, the MacRosses. They tell me at headquarters that Gairloch has been cultivating the Prince throughout the retreat. It seems he lived some while in Flanders for killing a man, and he has all the arts and vices that liketh our royal leader. A man of his sort is after no slight stake."

"I believe you, sir. But what could he accomplish by the Prince's aid?"

"If I knew, we might checkmate him," returned Lord George promptly. "I would do much for the little maid."

"He has wished to marry her, I have heard," I said doubtfully.

"The very thing!" Lord George slapped his knee. "Why, 'tis plain as your tartan, man. He wants to join the two wings of the clan with himself for chief. Best warn the lady to keep an eye on him. He thinks far ahead."

"That I will," I promised.

But upon thinking it over I decided not to bother her with what might possibly never come to an issue, and instead resolved to impart my warning to David. He listened to me with the stolidity that always distinguished him and his father.

"Sma' doot ye hae the richt o' it, Chisholm," he agreed when I had finished. "But there's naught tae be done 'til the deil mak's his move. 'Twas in ma mind he wad be preekin' some new ploy."

THE "new ploy" was not long in developing. On New Year's Day morning, whilst I was busy conning muster-rolls and victual warrants, Lord George sent word for me to put on my bonnet and ride with him.

"'Tis a council of some sort hastily summoned by the Prince's order," he explained,

Digitized by Google

when we had mounted. "I had word that the Master of Gairloch and Mistress MacRoss were amongst those bidden, so I conceived it might be of interest to you."

And he smiled at me ever so slightly, so that I was made to blush scarlet as a lass, a failing which I have never been able to conquer.

"Indeed, sir, 'twas kind of you to bear me in mind," I answered in confusion.

"How should I not?" said he, and broke out into laughter—at which all the fat burgesses in the street, who watched him passing, looked amazed, for 'twas Lord George who had bidden the Prince exact amends from Glasgow for its slack welcome by requiring the rationing and refitting of the army to the amount of ten thousand pounds, and in the minds of the douce citizens he was akin to Old Nick, himself.

At the Prince's door we were met by Sir Thomas Sheridan, who raised his eyebrows at sight of me.

"This council is confined to a bare few of the higher chiefs and generals," he said suggestively. "I think——"

Lord George, who never liked the man, cut him off short.

"Captain Chisholm, as you may see," he said, "wears the MacRoss tartan. He is present as a representative of the clan."

Much against his will, Sheridan stood aside, and we entered. Besides the Prince the room contained Sheila, her gray eyes black with the spirit of battle; David, Ian Dhu, the Master of Gairloch and one or two of his gentlemen; Lochiel, Clanranald, Cluny, the Duke of Perth, a pleasant nobleman whom everybody liked for his mildness and equable disposition; Sheridan and half-a-dozen others who were strangers to me. 'Twas evident they had been waiting upon Lord George, for as soon as he was seated the Prince cleared his throat and stood up.

"My lords and gentlemen," he said, "you are here, not as a council of war, but as an extra-legal body of advisers to help me to do that which is closest to my heart—I mean to compose the dissensions of my supporters and make Scotland the stronger and the better. 'Tis ever in my mind to drive from our ranks disagreements and enmity. Yet at the same time I would have you, and all others, believe that in so doing I am never moved by desire to take sides, but rather that all may be happy and well with my subjects.

"One of the most gallant of the clans that have drawn the sword for my father's cause is cleft by feud. Both of the factions are present with us, and at my suggestion they have agreed to call a truce whilst this war continues. Now, I should like to take another step. I should like to reunite the wings of the clan, to make it once more what it was in the bygone past, under a single chieftain."

He paused and looked at the Master, who was staring straight in front of him, fixedly as a beast of prey.

"As it happens," the Prince continued, "one branch of the Clan Ross, to which I am alluding, is led by a brave girl, whose energy in the field and on the march is equal to that of any officer we have. The other branch is led by a man, whose devotion and loyalty have proven superior to filial ties, a striking proof of faithfulness to which I can not deny acknowledgment. How happy a solution of a conflict begun by remote ancestors would be the union of these two branches in the persons of their leaders!"

I looked to see Sheila speak at this, but before she could have done so the Master was on his feet, bowing low to the Prince.

"Sir," said he, "have I your permission?" And as the Prince nodded, he proceeded: "'Tis useless for me to assure your Royal Highness that I could never hope to put so singular a situation with such felicity of expression and grace of language. My poor efforts must suffer vastly by comparison with yours, sir, and I pray you, gentlemen —" he turned to the others present, bowing low again—"remember that in my favor, if my words seem weak and colorless. The fact is, his Royal Highness has joined together thoughts which otherwise I should not have dared to confess.

"Apart from a natural and spontaneous admiration—nay, adoration, I might say—" he bowed a third time, with deep reverence, to Sheila, who ill-concealed a shudder—"for my rival in leadership of our broken clan, there has been in my mind the thought that 'twould be for the advantage of all of us, if the clan could be united once more. Sure, I protest, 'tis a thing never heard of before that a clan should be led in battle by a woman, however brave and skilled. And I can do no more than echo the sentiment of his Royal Highness that 'twould be a striking and salutary representation of the spirit which unites us all, could it be made

Digitized by Google

known that the centuries-old feud of the Clan Ross had been composed.

"I will go further, gentlemen—" he paused impressively at this—"I will say that it is my candid belief that my poor old father, whose mistaken loyalty to the House of the Usurper has been a sad cross for me to carry, would most certainly be won over to the side which could achieve such a triumph of peace."

And now Sheila was on her feet, the words pouring from her with a fury that seemed almost physical.

"I will not be pretending to dress up my thoughts in pretty garments, your Royal Highness," she declared through clinched teeth. "But for your own information, and because I would be thinking you have slight knowledge of the evil part you have been led into, this man here and his father murdered my father——"

A gasp shook the room, for this was one of the common tales of the Highlands which had never been brought out in court, so to speak. The Master's face went dead-white and his pupils began to dwindle, as I had seen them do once before, until they became mere pinpricks in the blank glare of his eyes.

"Aye," she went on, "maybe I could not be proving my words by what the Edinburgh justiciars call evidence, but 'tis the sober belief of the gentlemen and gillies of my clan that what I say is true."

Ian Dhu and David thrust forward their claymore hilts and growled assent. The Prince commenced to look worried.

But there was no checking Sheila. Head up and eyes dull-black with rage, she plunged on:

"For the rest, my clan is not a broken clan. I would be calling to your Royal Highness's attention that I joined you with five hundred men, and today I have not a man the less, although many a clan has desertions against its credit. Gairloch brought a bare three hundred, for his father and he saw to it that there were enough left home to gather in the harvest and protect the fields and kine against marauders.

"My clan, your Royal Highness, is the Clan Ross, as these gentlemen—" she waved to the Highland chiefs in the room—"will be telling you. We have the precedence, and at clan gatherings and state ceremonies, the head of my family is regarded as the Chief of Clan Ross.

"Should any tell you 'tis unusual for a woman to lead her clan, I would ask you to remember that my clan has been first in battle and last in retreat, and I have by my elbow advisers more skilled in fighting than Gairloch could bring forward. I will not be speaking further, because I feel that your Royal Highness would be the last to ask of me any action which abhors me so that I would sooner take the dirk at my knee and slit my throat with it."

THE Prince looked about him nervously, evidently seeking some support. But 'twas the Master of Gairloch who spoke.

"If your Royal Highness please," he said coldly, "I desire to do no more than deny the baseless charge which has been made against me. But in view of what has been said, I am fain to add that 'tis my opinion there is serious question in Scottish law if a woman may assume the chieftainship of a clan. 'Tis a well-known principle of clan government that the leadership descends always in the male line to the eldest born. Now, the direct line of the MacRosses of Slioch is dead, save for this lady here, and I contend she may not inherit the chieftainship. It should go——"

Ian Dhu stood up and strode into the middle of the room.

"Sit doon," he rasped at Gairloch, and there was that in his voice which made the Master obey. "I wull nae be glieg wi' ma tongue, your Royal Highness," continued Ian Dhu deliberately, "but I canna bide and hear such evil talk. There wull be the one thing to answer. 'Tis this: the Chief o' Clan Ross wull hae the leal hearrts o' all her clan. We want hersel' for chief, none other."

Sheila jumped to his side, one arm around his shoulders.

"Aye," she said, with a sob, "but Ian Dhu will not have told your Royal Highness all of the truth—that after myself it will be him that is the nearest heir to my father that is dead. But he and David, his son, would not have the chieftainship, and they and all the gentlemen of my name held out that it should go to me. And does your Royal Highness think that men as unselfish as that would be letting me wed with him?"

She pointed a scornful finger at the Master, whose answer was a slow, direct glare of impotent hate.

The Prince threw up his hands.

Digitized by Google

"I have put my foot in my mouth, as the French say, 'tis plain to see," he admitted with some humor. "But I would have you, Miss MacRoss, and all others here, believe that 'twas with the best intentions in the world."

"Your Royal Highness would not need to be saying that," she told him.

"I think my Royal Highness would," he returned ruefully.

He gave Gairloch a sharp look as he spoke, and 'twas very plain to all that he directed no word of sympathy in that quarter.

"There is just one question I should like to clear up," the Prince went on. "That is the matter of your succession. For your own sake, Miss MacRoss, let us establish the law of it here and now that there may be no more question in the future."

"I am willing for that," she answered.

"What say you, Lochiel?" asked the Prince of the chieftain he trusted above all others.

The Cameron wrinkled his brow.

"'Tis a novel point, your Royal Highness," he replied. "There can be no doubt that female inheritance is never practised in such matters in the Highlands. On the contrar', 'tis the custom, rather than otherwise, for Scots peerages, under the old law, to be heritable in the female line. What is to become of the succession after yourself, Miss Sheila?" he asked her.

For the first time in that tense hour her cheeks flooded with color, and she picked at the plaits in her kilt.

"'Tis the thought of my clan that on a certain day I will wed," she said very low.

Lochiel nodded.

"I see. And the gentleman will take your name?"

"That is so."

"A canny way out," Lochiel approved. "There would seem to be no flaw in Miss MacRoss's claim that I can see, your Royal Highness. She is the choice of her clan—more, the choice of the gentlemen of the clan, who only have the right of questioning her succession. If she weds and has sons, of her name, then 'twill give them clear heritance of her right."

"You reason like a jurist and a logician combined," cried the Prince to Lochiel. "The Court of Session could not have done better. But there is yet one more question I wish to ask Miss MacRoss." His eyes twinkled. "Have you such a gentleman in mind?"

Again the rich blood dyed her neck and cheeks to crimson hue, so that I tingled in every limb, as I strained forward to catch her answer.

"No, sir," she said.

CHAPTER XI

THE BOW-LEGGED MAN FROM GLEN STROAN

ONE day ere we left Glasgow I was minded to speak to Lord George and ask him why it was, although appointed to the Prince's staff, I was retained on his.

"Why? Do you dislike me, lad?" he growled.

"Nay, I but wished to know had I earned the Prince's displeasure," I said quickly.

He sanded a dispatch I had just handed him to be signed.

"When you are older, Chisholm," he remarked, "you will learn that close acquaintance with princes is often less desirable than friendship at a distance."

"The Prince is always kind to me," I returned dubiously, "but he has never——"

Lord George threw me a keen glance.

"You have not suspected, then?" he interrupted.

"Suspected what?"

"Why you were retained about my person?"

"What reason could there be?" I asked in amazement.

He smiled indulgently, his ferocious face creasing into a thousand deep-riven wrinkles.

"I will leave that to your own powers of discernment," he answered. "'Tis high time you cultivated them, if you hunger after courts."

And he rose up to go out upon his rounds of inspection of the soldiers' billets, a routine which was never properly attended to by Mr. Quartermaster-General Sullivan, one of the Prince's coterie of adventurers, who left all the hard work for others and scrambled among themselves for the lion's share of whatever glory was to be obtained.

"There is this much I will tell you," Lord George added, as he tarried in the doorway. "I am sure you are innocent of deceit. It needed not your childlike surprise a moment since to tell me that."

His words set me to thinking, as I daresay he intended they should. That evening

Digitized by Google

at the Lyon Tavern, where I went to dine, I encountered Sir Thomas Sheridan and placed my troubles before him. I liked not the man for his smug ways, his influence over the Prince and his malice toward Lord George. But he was always at pains to be civil to me, and he had once known my father.

"Tell me, Sir Thomas," I said when his glass had been filled, "have I lost his Royal Highness's favor?"

Sheridan looked up in surprise.

"*Ma foi*, Captain Chisholm," he cried in his foreign way, "what gave you that idea?"

"Why," said I stubbornly, "at Derby the Prince was pleased to appoint me to his own staff; but immediately he detailed me to serve with Lord George Murray, and with Lord George I have stayed ever since."

Sir Thomas critically studied the bouquet of his sherry, then set it down.

"Did it never occur to you," he asked quietly, "that you might be of greater service to the Prince where you are than by his side?"

This confounded me.

"I would not have you think me ungrateful or complaining," I protested. "But it seemed to me strange."

"That I quite understand," he replied. "And let me say, once and for all, that the Prince has the highest regard for you. When we finally place his royal father in St. James's, Captain Chisholm," he continued unctuously, "you will have a true friend at court, I can assure you."

"But you say I can be of more service to the Prince where I am than by his person?" I pressed. "What——"

He raised a fat hand in a gesture that was truly ecclesiastical.

"Surely," said he, lowering his voice to a whisper and with a cautious glance over his shoulder, "you have heard these tales of Lord George? Nay? Well, that is remarkable, for they are well-circulated."

I felt sick at heart.

"What is their purport?" I inquired.

"There is nothing definite," he returned. "Nothing one can hang a peg to, so to speak. But Lord George, my dear Captain Chisholm, is a most peculiar person. His family, as I daresay you know, is divided upon the issue. Although he was out in the Fifteen and again in '19, he sued for a pardon and returned home to live under the Elector.

"He even applied for a commission in the army, and shortly before his Royal Highness arrived in Scotland he renewed his request for military service. Since then, some of his actions have aroused suspicion. Frankly Captain Chisholm, we do not trust him."

"But—but—what—" I strangled back the impulse to throw the lie in the complacent Irishman's throat—"what is it he has done? What incidents? Surely, he did not conduct the retreat as one in league with the English?"

"Ah, you go too fast, Captain Chisholm, you go too fast," murmured Sir Thomas. "Did I say he was 'in league with the English'? 'Tis not necessary, my dear lad. When you have seen as much of political intrigue as I have, you will apprehend that an application for a pardon may be prepared for in many divers ways."

I leaned forward fiercely in my seat.

"I give you fair warning, Sir Thomas," "I said, "I will not play the spy—not even for his Royal Highness. I am a soldier, if it please you. For dirty work, you must go elsewhere."

Sir Thomas was quite appalled at this—nay, shocked.

"But my dear Chisholm," he exclaimed, "have I ever asked you to be a spy? St. Malachy, but 'tis a warm-blooded youth! Consider the situation calmly. The Prince has come here to Scotland practically penniless and friendless, trusting entirely to the devotion of his subjects. A reward of thirty thousand pounds is put upon his head. Think of it—thirty thousand pounds! A fortune for any man or group of men. He sees enemies on all sides of him.

"He can not be too careful. And then he hears rumors that his Lieutenant-General is not stanch. What can he do? He must know. He can not trust to chance, to human charity. He must have a trusty agent at hand to acquaint him of aught suspicious. You, Chisholm, the Prince has honored with this trust, because he knew that your loyalty would prompt you to report to him anything unusual, even if you had not been warned."

Sir Thomas leaned back in his chair, sipped his wine and smiled benevolently.

"Well, I don't like it," I growled sulkily. "If the Prince ever says anything to me about it, I will tell him so."

"Tut, tut, 'tis all work for the cause," Sir Thomas assured me cheerily.

Digitized by Google

BUT next morning I told Lord George what Sheridan had said—to his own vast amusement.

"'Swounds, Chisholm," he exclaimed, "You are an odd secret agent! Or is this some Jesuitical trick you have newly learned for trapping me into a confession?"

He saw the hurt in my eyes.

"Nay, lad," he added instantly, "that was in jest, as I thought you would understand. I appreciate your confidence, and would have you know it, for many men would have allowed their convictions to be swayed by the bare knowledge that Royalty suspected."

All the ugliness and strength of his face came out as his features twisted with some mental pain which he strove to control.

"'Tis not easy for me, Chisholm, to know that my sovereign deems me a potential traitor, when all my thoughts are concentrated upon his service. And they who make these formless, factless charges against me prove their idiocy when they do so, for what chance of pardon have I, a man already pardoned for two previous rebellions? Why, there is no man of us all the Elector would rather hang—no, not the Prince himself!"

He smiled grimly.

"Either way my doom is hard. Should the Stuarts win, mine enemies will say 'twas despite my traitorous support; should they lose, I will be lucky if I have the heading-block and not the rope for my portion. 'Tis a mad world, boy, a mad world!"

After that I was ready to stake my life on his honesty, as indeed, was almost every man in the army, outside of the little clique that had the Prince's ear and poured into it poisons besmirching the fame of every individual who rallied to his support and whose power and influence came to threaten their own.

As I went from Lord George that afternoon, hot in my heart at the injustice and roguery about, I encountered the Master of Gairloch, elbowing the citizens out of his path in the street and making audible comments on the appearance of their womenfolk. Now, none had less use than I for Glasgow's sour, canting Whigs, that squinted down their long noses at us and cursed us behind locked doors; but the sight of Gairloch roused something elemental within me. I was in the mood for trouble, and any excuse would serve.

"'Slife, sir," I said, placing myself carefully in his way. "Has an officer of his Royal Highness no better means of diversion than this?"

His tight lips jerked into a tigerish smile.

"'Tis in my mind, Captain Chisholm, that you refused to fight me," he answered softly. "Fear is a great stickler for punctiliousness, I have heard."

I laughed, for my rage was cold and he could not prod me into a temper.

"I would as soon fight the town ratter," I told him.

That got under his hide—'twas brutal enough, in all truth. He took a quick step toward me, hand in air; but my eyes met his, with their dwindling pupils focussing into emptiness, and he saw I was ready for him. He stopped, breathing hard.

"The day will come when every word you have said will choke you in your throat," he hissed. "I might force a fight upon you, now, but 'twould interfere with my plans. I have a way of striking at you," he went on significantly, "that will hurt more than steel."

The indescribable malice in his look gave me a clear comprehension of what he meant.

"Aye, to threaten women is a fit occupation for you," I replied scornfully. "But you had best be careful who you talk to."

"I see you wear her tartan," he snarled back. "A livery, in a manner of speaking, I take it?"

His manner was foul, as his insinuation was plain.

"I am disposed to put my mark on you for that," I said, still icy-cold.

He backed off, reaching for his claymore.

"With the steel? You flatter yourself, you dog. No, this way!"

And before he well knew my intention I drove my fist into his teeth, crushing a gap in his mouth and knocking him flat in the mire of the cobbled way.

He was up again in an instant, muddied and swearing and spitting blood; but when he saw the gathering crowd of citizens and Highlanders he contented himself with threats of what should befall me in the future.

"'Tis an old story, sir," I mocked him. "I grow weary of it."

"Englishman," he said with deadly venom, the blood and dirt streaking his corpse-white face, "you will yet pray me for death by the sword."

Digitized by Google

Evan, my servant that Sheila had insisted upon giving me, touched my arm as Gairloch walked off.

"She wull pe pad mon," he said in his broken Gaelic. "Gif t'e night is dark she wull stap yoursel' i' t'e pack."

"That's comforting," I considered. "What's to be done, Evan?"

"Evan wull be here," he answered slyly. "Hersel' can stap i' t'e dark as well as Gairloch's gillies."

It was all over Glasgow before night that I had struck down the Master of Gairloch, and what would have come of it had we remained in the city I know not, for the Clan Ross and Gairloch's men were up in arms against each other, and it required the intervention of the Camerons to avert an open fight. But the Prince, disgusted with his reception, suddenly decided to abandon Glasgow the next day, and matters were so arranged that the length of the column was kept between the two clans.

Lord George gave me a harsh dressing-down—as I daresay I deserved—for allowing myself to be tempted into a broil. 'Twas no part for an officer to play, he chided. But the MacRosses more than made up for his rebuke. Sheila scolded me and in the same breath told me I was the best man of the clan.

"For 'tis you have first drawn the blood of the Gray Fox's son."

"Who is the Gray Fox?" I asked curiously.

"Who but him that calls himself Lord Gairloch? Did you ever see him you would be knowing the reason for his name. Red eyes he has, and his hair is gray and he has the seeming of a fox. Has he not, David?"

David, who had just crushed my hand in his, grunted assent.

"The Master is bad," added Sheila with a shiver; "but the Gray Fox—he will be evil!"

Old Ian Dhu, too, came up and for the first time gave me a crunching grip with his enormous fingers.

"Yoursel' wull be a braw mon—for an Englishmon," he said gravely.

WE REACHED Stirling in two days' march, and were met there by Lord John Drummond, a general in the French king's service, with a fine reinforcement of nigh four thousand men, including Highlanders and the few troops he had brought with him from France. What pleased the Prince most, however, was that Lord John had with him cannon of battering size, and nothing would satisfy his Royal Highness now but that we sit down before Stirling Castle and bring it to terms.

The lords and chieftains were loath to take this course, for we had more than eight thousand men with us, fairly well equipped, brave, eager for battle and entirely confident that they could beat any troops the English might bring against us. The Scots were anxious to drive the enemy out of Edinburgh, that had been retaken as soon as we had left it, and again march south, at least to clear the Lowlands.

After that, they said, if it did not seem wise to attempt a second march upon London, we could turn back and at our leisure dispose of such few garrisons as remained loyal to the Hanoverian. But the Prince would not listen to them. So long as Stirling Castle was held for the English, he declared, our retreat to the Highlands was menaced.

In the face of his attitude there was naught to be done but carry forward the siege as briskly as possible. The clans were cantoned in near-by villages, and trenches were begun by the French troops, for the Highlanders refused flatly for the most part to try this kind of warfare. 'Twas dull work, at best, but exceeding busy for me, for Lord George must needs establish a post of observation between Falkirk and Linlithgow to guard against a surprise from Edinburgh; and our time was spent in riding back and forth between these points and the Prince's headquarters at Bannockburn House.

This meant that I saw little of the MacRosses, who were quartered at St. Ninians, a village between Bannockburn and Stirling, and one afternoon, after we had been four or five days at the tedious routine of siegecraft, I obtained leave to visit them, while Lord George conferred with the Prince and other chieftains.

With Evan running beside me, I rode down the village street, somewhat surprised at the few Highlanders in evidence. But Evan soon learned that the bulk of the clan were out on foraging expeditions, it being no easy task to feed five hundred hungry men.

A buxom Lowland woman came to the

Digitized by Google

door of Sheila's quarters in answer to my knock.

"The young leddy's gaed oot," she said curtly.

"With Mr. David MacRoss?"

"Nae, I dinna ken the loon."

"It wasn't Mr. Ian Dhu MacRoss?" I asked doubtfully.

"Nae, I'm tellin' ye, I dinna ken the loon."

She made to shut the door in my face, but I would not let her.

"This is passing strange," I said. "Miss MacRoss never goes abroad without——"

"Aye, 'tis passin' strange ye canna let a body be. What havers wad ye mak' ower a lassie's oot-gangin' an' in-gangin'?"

"Did Miss MacRoss say nothing when she went out?" I insisted. "Leave no message?"

The woman scratched her head thoughtfully.

"I was that busy wi' ma bannocks I didna mind owermuch, but ma thocht is that she was greetin'."

"Crying?"

A sense of foreboding for which I could not account wrapped clammy hands around my soul.

"Just that," said the woman stubbornly.

I turned to Evan.

"Run and find Mr. David as fast as you may. Bring him hither."

By this time I had my shoulder between door and jamb, and the woman saw there was no dislodging me. I reached down into my sporran and took out a golden guinea.

"Do you see this?" I remarked.

Her eyes glistened, but she shook her head.

"The other mon gied me one o' they Georgies," she said cunningly, and to prove it, hauled a dirty guinea from a pocket of her dress.

"Then I will give you two," I said promptly. "Come, everything that you know! 'Twill go hard with you," I warned, "if the Highlanders should suspect that you had a hand in any harm that may have befallen Miss MacRoss."

Her face blanched at this, and she extended a clutching hand for the coins I held.

"After you have told your story," I answered, waving her back. "Out with it!"

"Aweel, 'twere this wise, sir," she began. "There came a tap on the door. I lifted the latch, and there was a bow-legged mon, wi' a stragglin' lock o' black hair on his forehead an' a bit cast in one eye. Wi'oot a word he hands me the Georgie. 'That wull be to help ye to forget,' he says, when 'twas in ma nieve. 'What wull ye hae?' says I. 'A worrd wi' the young leddy,' says he.

"There was seemin' no harm in that, an' I called her below. The bow-legged mon told her summat I couldna hear, but she greeted oot loud. 'Is he dead?' she speered. He said more to that, and she pushed him oot the door. 'Tak' me to him,' she cried. 'Quick, before 'tis ower-late.' And that wull be all I hearrd."

"How was the bow-legged mon dressed?" asked a voice behind me.

'Twas David, and I could see that the woman feared him.

"Like any o' ye Highlandmen," she retorted sullenly.

"Aye," pursued David ponderously, "but his tartan—was it the like o' this?"

He held out a fold of his own plaid.

"The verra same," she averred.

He gave her a keen glance. Then spoke rapidly to Evan in the Gaelic.

"Is she lying?" I asked him in a whisper.

"We wull ken that soon," he returned. "I hae sent Evan to speer the sentries if they saw a stranger in the MacRoss tartan."

I repeated to David what I had discovered before his arrival, and as I finished Evan brought up a clansman who had stood guard at the end of the street. Yes, he said, he had seen a strange man in the MacRoss tartan. He was from Glen Stroan——

"That wull be the far edge o' Gairloch's lands," David threw over his shoulder to me in the midst of translating.

"How did ye ken him?" he asked the man next.

"My sheiling is just over the mountain-top from his," the fellow answered, still in the Gaelic. "We meet herding the kine."

"What was he doing here?"

"He said he had a message for the Master, and some Lowlander had misdirected him, thinking the MacRosses he asked for were us."

"Did you ask him why he wore our tartan?"

"He said he had to pass through certain glens that were up to get here, and he was afraid that when the people of those glens saw him coming from the country that the Gray Fox holds for the king and wearing the Gray Fox's tartan they would suspect him and do him a mischief."

Digitized by Google

David went through this cross-examination with great care and deliberation, whilst all the time I was sweating with fear and the desire for action.

"Have done, have done," I begged at last. "Talking will get us nowhere!"

He replied, as if he had not heard me:

"This wull be the Master's worrk, Chisholm."

"Well, raise the clan," I urged. "For God's sake, do something!"

He shook his head.

"'Tis a ploy for twa-three men o' their hands. If they canna save her, 'twull be beyond the clan. Are ye wi' me in this?"

"I am surprised that you should waste your breath," I retorted.

David smiled.

"We'll be off then," he said.

CHAPTER XII

DAVID AND I GO UPON A JOURNEY

"'TIS a black business," said Lord George, when I asked him for leave to join David. "You may go and welcome, Chisholm. I wish there was more I might do for you."

"You can lay the Master by the heels," I rejoined hotly.

"Nay, nay, lad. 'Twould never do. You have naught but suspicions to go upon in leveling charges against him. They serve for me, but others would laugh at them. Best bide your time. I will see that he is watched, and if he makes a false move, why, then, mayhap, we shall catch him red-handed."

"He is far too clever for that," I answered, for the full measure of the task was beginning to dawn upon me.

Lord George dropped a kind hand on my shoulder.

"Tut, tut," he said. "Knaves always make mistakes. Remember that. They will do the little maid no ill—she is too valuable a prisoner. 'Tis for you to track Gairloch's minions to their lair. No easy task, I grant you, but you know not the skill and resource of our Highlanders. Heed David's counsel. He is wise at this manner of pother."

I bade him good-by and rode back to seek the MacRosses; and had I chanced upon the Master in that mood no power under heaven could have saved him from me. My fingers itched to be at his throat.

David and Ian Dhu were ready and waiting for me. Neither had much to say.

"Ye maun leave your Lowland nag," remarked David briefly. "She wull be ower bonnie for the Highlands."

"Do we walk?" I asked.

"Nae more than wull be called for. I hae twa bit mountain ponies that wull mak' naething o' the glen roads."

"That blade wull nae be o' Highland smithin'," commented Ian Dhu, pointing at my English broadsword.

David agreed, and from their quarters presently produced a claymore of regulation pattern.

"Noo ye wull do," he said, after a survey from head to toe of my figure.

"Have you a plan?" I queried eagerly.

"'Tis early for talk o' plans, but we hae this much to gang on. Our men hae tracked Bow-legs frae here to the ford o' Forth above Stirling Castle. There they took the Doune road, whilk means they wull be for the Highlands."

"And we?"

"We follow."

Evan and another gillie brought up the horses, and we mounted them. When I was in saddle Ian Dhu grasped my hand.

"Masel' wull be auld for this worrk," he said earnestly, "but ye wull be a braw mon—for an Englishmon—and ye maun just stand by David and do what ye may in ma stead. Ye wull be the first Sassenach to wear the tartan o' the Clan Ross. Hersel' wull be proud o' ye if ye do boldly."

And he turned away without giving me a chance to reply. Ian Dhu never judged men by words. Their actions were all that concerned him.

The short Winter day was dying as we forded the Forth, well out of range of the castle guns, and headed for Doune. 'Twas dark as pitch there in the valley of the River Teith, but David knew the way of old, and we followed it at a sharp trot, the gillies running behind us. Ere ten of the clock we sighted the looming bulk of Doune Castle, and a picket of the garrison that held it for Prince Charles halted us in the road.

Yes, they said, a bow-legged man and a girl, with half-a-dozen gillies, had passed six or seven hours before.

"Did ye call them to halt?" demanded David.

"Nae," said the sergeant of the picket.

Digitized by Google

"We hae orrders to let all gang free that are peaceable in the daylicht. 'Tis only after darrk we maun stop passers-by."

"One chance ganged awa'," was David's only comment upon this, as we rode on.

In the straggling village street we found a fairly good tavern, at which he suggested we put up for the night.

"'Tis nae manner o' use to be killin' oursel's wi' crowdin' the road," he declared. "They hae all the start o' us they wull need. In the morrn we wull be after them again, wi' fresh horses, and we maun just manage to come up wi' Bow-legs before he gets where he's gangin' to—and I dinna ken yet where that may be."

With daylight in the morning we were ahorse and pressing for Callander. Here, at the Sign of the Hart, kept by one MacTavish, we were told that a party such as we described had gone through the preceding evening.

"They didna stop?" asked David.

"Nae," answered the unkempt fellow who brought us stiff noggins of Scots whisky against the cold. "They bided but to eat a sma' bite."

The road from Callander led upward through the Pass of Leny, and despite the worries on my mind I could not help but exclaim at the grandeur of the mountain scenery. Used as I had been to the flatlands of Suffolk, these ponderous heights that reared three thousand feet above us were awe-inspiring, as well as beautiful.

To the left of us was a huge peak which David called Ben Ledi, and to our right a companion giant, Ben Vorlich, hulked across the sky, spotted with dabs of snow and crowned by a tawny halo of wind-whipped clouds. The gale that tossed the clouds about in scattered squadrons blew also down the pass in our faces, but I did not mind its icy breath. I could understand now the passionate devotion of the Highlanders to their home country, the haunting loveliness of their songs, and the poetic fervor that shone occasionally in the speech of the humblest gillie.

AFTER quitting the pass the road wound between the blue waters of Loch Lubnaig and the foothills of Ben Vane. The wild fowl whirred overhead across the lake, but otherwise we saw no signs of life for an hour. Then a lone figure, leading a pony, broke the skyline. A few minutes later we met him, a pedler with oddly assorted pack and a pair of whimsical blue eyes. He stopped, and we, perforce, stopped, too.

"Braw weather for Januar'," he suggested.

"Aye," returned David. "Hae ye come far?"

"Aweell, I would nae just say far," said the pedler cautiously, "but I hae been off awa' across the hills."

He wrinkled his eyes in a slight smile.

"'Tis all one to me, d'ye ken. I'm to this bothy the nicht, mayhap, and in the morrn's morrnin' I wull be miles awa' in the heather."

David pulled a flask from his pocket.

"Wull ye hae a sup against the cold?" he asked.

"'Twould gae fine."

As David handed the flask to the pedler, he commenced to hum a ranting, frolicsome melody that was popular in the Highland camps.

"Hey, Johnny Cope, are ye waukin' yet?
And are your drums abeatin' yet?
If ye were waukin' I would wait,
Tae gang tae the coals i' the morrnin'."

The pedler took a swig from the flask and handed it back.

"A grand melody—and sentiment," he approved. "But I'll gie ye one o' the same style."

He cleared his throat and sang:

"The piper came to our town, to our town, to our town,
The piper came to our town, and he played bonnilie.
He played a spring, the laird tae please,
A spring brent new frae 'yont the seas;
And then he gae his bags a wheeze,
And played another key.

"And wasna he a roguey, a roguey, a roguey,
And wasna he a roguey, the piper o' Dundee?
He played 'The Welcome Ower the Main,'
And 'Ye'se be fouse and I'se be fadin',
And 'Auld Stuart's Back Again,'
Wi' muckle mirth and glee."

"I see ye hae the correct view o' state matterrs," said David seriously. "Forby ye hae a bonny voice in your gullet. What d'ye call yoursel'?"

"Johnny Gordon, they call me in these parrts," answered the pedler. "I'm frank to say in times like these I hae guid use for twa-three names."

"There's others like ye," David admitted.

Digitized by Google

"So I'm tauld. I tak' it, sir, ye're wi' Prince Charlie?"

"Aye."

"Ye wull be frae Stirling—and I hear he's there?"

"Aye."

The pedler took out a small black pipe and filled it.

"How d'ye call yoursel'?" he inquired in turn.

"MacRoss," replied David.

"O' that ilk?"

"Aye."

The pedler puffed away at his pipe for a minute without speaking.

"And yon tall laddie?" he pointed his pipe-stem at me.

"I wear the clan tartan, as you can see," I answered impatiently.

"Aye, ye do, but there's others do the same wi'oot the richt—or I wull be mistaken," returned the pedler mildly. "However, ye wull be English, whilk was wha' I sought to ken."

"'Tis in my mind," said David, "that ye mean more nor ye say."

The pedler nodded.

"I do."

"Hae ye seen aught o' a bow-legged mon——"

"Wi' a pasty-white face and greasy black forelock danderin' doon the cheek o' him, and a lassie on a pony aside o' him—not to be speakin' o' five or six caterans wad as soon cut the throat o' any they meet as say: 'How far wull be Aberdeen?'"

The pedler shot this off in a single breath—and he almost shot me off my horse in doing it. But David listened calmly throughout the statement.

"'Tis the parrty I hae in mind," he conceded.

"Aye, the message wad be for yoursel'—or for yon Englishman," continued the pedler. "This morrn I was at Killin by the end o' Loch Tay, when they cam' in, and a wae, weary parrty they were. In the taverrn yard, whiles I was makin' ma starrt, the lassie brushed by.

"'If ye meet MacRosses on the road,' she says, 'wi' a tall Englishmon, tell 'em she they wull seek passed Killin and there was talk o' crossin' Glen Lochay, but she doesna ken where they wull gang after.'

"'Just that?' says I.

"'Just that,' says she. 'But if you believe in the Good Cause be carefu' ye dinna speak wi' traitorrs. Best look for the Englishmon. If he's there, 'tis safe.' There are more kinds than one o' MacRosses following the Highland road these days.'

"Before she could say more the bow-legged mon comes toward us, and I was busy at ma packin'. She went wi' him into the taverrn, and I put a long piece o' road behind masel', for I didna like the looks o' Bow-legs."

I cannot tell you the thrill of pleasure it gave me to know that Sheila had taken for granted that I would be among those who set forth to rescue her. The whole world seemed changed, and I was at a loss to comprehend how David could accept it so dispassionately.

"Glen Lochay might mean Argyle or Stroan," he speculated, just as though nothing unusual had happened. "Aweel, we maun gang our own gait, Mr. Gordon, but I'm gey gratefu' to ye for the serrvice, and I'd like fine to see ye again."

"'Tis naught at all," affirmed the pedler, emptying the ashes from his little pipe. "I wish ye all success, and I wad be on wi' ye, only I hae business below."

He winked and whistled the spirited air of "The White Cockade." We left him plodding along beside the laden pony, his shrill piping vieing with the wind that shrieked through the rocks.

"'Twas a meeting worth while," I said somewhat critically, as we resumed our journey, "but certes, the man need not have been so long in giving us his information."

"Wad ye hae him glieg and free wi' any strangerrs o' the wayside?" replied David. "These are nae times for bletherin' wi' them ye dinna ken."

"Mayhap, but he could have found out who we were in much less time," I declared stubbornly.

"By speerin' and haverin' like one wi' summat to tell?" David retorted.

He chuckled and glanced back at the lonely figure already nearly out of sight.

"Dod, Chisholm, yon was nae more a pedler nor yoursel'."

"What was he, then?"

"I canna tell ye that. I suspectet him at first sight, whilk were the reason I tried him wi' the music. He gaed me the richt answer—and there are few men in Scotland know that to 'Johnny Cope' the answer is 'The Piper o' Dundee.' 'Tis in reason he comes frae the Norrth — Inverrness or

Digitized by Google

thereabouts. He wull hae news o' some kind for the Prince."

'Twas pitch-dark when we rode out of Glen Ogle into Killin, shivering from the bitter cold. The inn was a tumbledown, ramshackle structure, with a bush over the door and no sign that I could see.

"Be carefu' wi' your tongue," David admonished me as we dismounted. "We wull be ower close to the Campbell country to mak' me cozy here."

Evan and the other gillie led the ponies around behind the building to a second hovel that did duty for stables. David and I were met on the threshold by the proprietor, a dour ruffian with a pitted face. He rubbed his hands together too much to suit me. 'Tis a mark of hypocrisy, if no worse, that I have never known to fail.

"It wull be verra infrequent we hae such bonnie shentlemons stop here," he said, smirking and slanting his eye so you could not tell which way he was looking. "Ma house is poor, but ye shall hae all I can gie ye."

"We want little," said David shortly.

We strode in by him, and surveyed our surroundings as men do when they feel hostility in the atmosphere. There was a single large room, with a fireplace, whereon a pile of logs and peat flared duskily, and scattered through the shadows were a number of stools and rude tables. To one side a door opened into a second room which served as kitchen. A ladder at the rear led up to a garret which was all the other accommodation afforded. Rushes covered the floor.

Several villagers, who sat drinking at the farthest table, got up as we entered, and shambled out with a muttered greeting in the Gaelic. Simultaneously, a barefooted wench, not ill-looking for all her frowsiness, came in from the kitchen.

"Draw stools to the hearth," the innkeeper directed her. "The shentlemons wull be cauld."

She obeyed him silently, only throwing a keen glance at us as she crossed the room.

"An' noo wull ye be pleased to gie me your orrderrs?" inquired the innkeeper, again twisting his hands in the folds of his filthy kilt.

"Red meat, if ye hae it," said David, "bannocks and a sup o' whisky."

"Aye, sir, 'tis easily done."

He spoke to the girl in Gaelic this time and she retreated to the kitchen.

"Ye hae no other company, I see," remarked David as he sat down close to the fire.

"The times be bad for travelin'."

David made no response to this, and the host fussed around us, shifting stools and a table, as if he sought excuse to remain. Finally he plumped out:

"An' your sarrvants? Wull they be gied the same as ye hae orrderred for yoursel's?"

"Aye," said David.

Another pause. Then:

"How mony wull they be?"

"Twa," said David, with the slightest flutter of his eyelid at me.

"Braw business ye hae brocht me, shentlemons," protested our host, slimily cordial. "Fower guests in the nicht—'tis ower grand business in these times, wi' fechtin' an' rievin' an' ootlawin' in all parrts."

The wench reentered from the kitchen before David could reply. She carried a large wooden tray containing a jug of whisky, several heavy tumblers and a pot of hot water. The light from the fire flickered unevenly between the shadows that filled the corners of the room, and in her passage she failed to heed a stool which the proprietor had moved into her path. She stumbled and sank to her knee, saving the whisky-jug, but upsetting the hot water, so that it fell to the floor and shattering, cast drops upon the hairy hand of our host.

He shrieked his anger at such an injury—I daresay 'twas the first time hot water had ever caressed his hide—and caught the girl a stout buffet on the ear. The blow scarce hurt her. Indeed, she made no account of it, and did not even weep. But the brutal deliberation with which the scoundrel acted, after first wiping off his hand on his kilt, roused my temper. I took him by the scruff of the neck and jerked him to his knees.

"Is that a way to treat a woman?" I exclaimed. "'Twas your own error led the wench to stumble. You put the stool in her way. Now take a dose of your own medicine."

WHEREAT I dealt him the brother to the buffet he had given her. He snarled and reached for his dirk, but thought better of it, scrambling to his feet and sullenly asserting that "hersel' was

Digitized by Google

his own dochter an' he meant no harm by it."

"Then no harm is done," said I, "for in the same way, I meant no harm to you."

He looked at me in a way I did not like. It was too knowing by far.

"If ye were Scots-born ye wad ken Highland lassies thrive wi' muckle chappin'," he said sulkily.

"My friend is in the richt," interrupted David sharply. "I am Scots-born—aye, and Highland-born—and I hae yet to hear any honest mon howd wi' ye on that."

The innkeeper shrugged his shoulders.

"Hersel' is a seelly hizzie," he growled. "A broke pot is nae sma' matter."

When the rascal had gone back into the kitchen David shook his head at me.

"'Twas nae canny to gie yoursel' awa' so hasty, Chisholm. An' Englishmon in the Highlands is a marked mon."

"What would you have?" I answered testily. "I cannot stand by and see a girl——"

"Nae doot, nae doot," said David with his usual unconquerable mildness. "But she wull be used to it, d'ye ken? Ye hae done her nae guid. On the contrar', I wad wager she wull get her pay wi' interest after ye hae ganged on."

This was unanswerable, but when dinner arrived I was moved to a certain amusement by the fact that the green venison which was served to me was the choicest morsel of a steak, whilst David and the two gillies, who joined us, were compelled to exert all the power of their jaws to masticate the portions the wench served them. Aside from this, she made no indication of gratitude, and I think she did not utter a word from the time we entered the place.

When we had all finished, David called up the landlord, complimented him as though he had been the majordomo of the White Horse Tavern in Edinburgh, and presented him with a noggin of whisky.

"Wull we sleep above?" inquired David, when this had been drained at a single gulp.

"Aye—an' there wull be plenty room for the sarrvants," he answered almost eagerly.

"That wull do fine," says David, getting to his feet with a long stretch. "Oh, and one question more. Hae ye seen aught the day o' a bow-legged mon, wi' a lassie on a pony an' a handfu' o' gillies?"

"Nae, sir," said the innkeeper quite blandly.

David looked at me, and I looked at David. This was not what the pedler had led us to expect.

"Are ye sure?" insisted David.

"A bow-legged mon?" repeated our host. "Nae, shentlemons, I wad ken a loon the like o' that. I hae few guests, an' a bow-legged mon—wi' a lassie on a pony, ye said? —I wad nae misremember that."

"Aweell, 'tis no matter," said David. "We'll to bed. A guid nicht to ye."

"A braw guid nicht, sir—an' here's a candle to licht ye above."

Bowing and scraping and rubbing his hands, the innkeeper ushered us to the ladder-stairs.

"Ye need hae nae fears for your beasties, sirs—" were his last words. "I wull keep ma ear on to the shed."

CHAPTER XIII

THE HUT ON RANNOCH MOOR

"WELL, what do you make of it?" I asked David so soon as we were safe out of hearing up the ladder-stairs.

David studied the guttering tallow-dip in his hand, whilst the two gillies rustled the straw and pine-branches into rude couches.

"The mon lied," he said at last.

"Yes, but why?"

Down-stairs our host moved about with ostentatious vigor, slamming shut the entrance-door and jamming down the bar that held it in place. David cocked an ear toward the stairs.

"I'd like fine to ken that, Chisholm—wi' the reason for all that noise the sleekit bangster wad be raisin'."

"What's to do, then?"

"Nought. We canna be on the road this hour, wi' the cauld and our own bones weary. We maun just wait for the morrning. The best ye can do wull be sleep."

"Sleep?" I retorted. "I have no wish for sleep! 'Tis a fine thing to lie down and sleep, when the scent has failed us! I would be planning some new way to take up the chase."

"Aweell," said David, "if ye tak' my rede ye wull mak' siccar for the morrow."

He rolled up in his plaid.

"Forby, it micht be well for one o' us to keep an eye open. Yon rascal wull hae all the look o' a Campbell—and Campbells hae been kenned to cut throats in the darrk

Digitized by Google

before this. Put the hilt o' your dirk where ye can reach it."

With this he blew out the tallow-dip, turned over and in two minutes was snoring. The gillies had preceded him whilst we were talking, each a round ball in the straw that covered the floor. I lay down on the bed they had piled for me near the head of the stairs and pulled the plaid off my shoulders, making shift to enwrap myself as David had done.

How long I lay I do not know. I do remember that the house had quieted down. The mice began to cheep in the wall close by; now and then a coal snapped on the hearth below-stairs. Then I must have dozed quietly, for I was conscious of arousing, with the cold sweat drenching my body, at sound of a faint scraping on the ladder-stairs. I rose to my haunches and crouched ready to spring, dagger in hand. I never thought of awakening David, who lay within reach of my hand; I did not think there was time.

My eyes were glued on the opening at the head of the ladder. The scraping sound drew nearer, as some one stole up slowly, rung by rung. The shadows wavered, became confused. A figure appeared stealthily, first the neck, next the shoulders, finally the torso—and with a shock I realized that it was the innkeeper's daughter!

Had she been deputed to murder us? Had we fallen into the toils of some unnatural creature, whose depravity exceeded even that which was revealed in the face of the man who must lie waiting to hear the dagger blows driven home? I shuddered. For the innkeeper I was ready. Into him I would have slipped my dirk with never a qualm of conscience. But I liked not the thought of attacking a woman.

In my agitation I must have shifted my position, for suddenly, she paused in the opening and placed a finger to her lips, with a soft hiss for silence.

"What want you?" I croaked in a hoarse whisper, the terror which had just gripped me still tugging at my throat.

There was light enough from the flickering hearth down-stairs to discern her face as the shadows flitted to and fro.

"Ye maun flee out o' this," she whispered back. "Himsel' wull hae the throats o' ye cut the nicht."

"Who do you mean?" I asked, scarce comprehending her words.

"Him that ye put your fist to, Englishmon."

"Your father?"

"He's called that," she admitted laconically.

There was a stirring behind me, and I turned to see David rising to his knees. He said nothing, but the wonder showed in his eyes as a stray beam of firelight shone upon them.

"The girl is come up to give warning her father intends to murder us," I explained.

"Where wull he hae ganged to?" questioned David.

"He's ganged to them he can trust," she returned. "Dinna fash yoursel'. He wull be back befower daylicht. There's them near wad be gey glad to kill ye."

"Why do you tell us?"

She stared at him—and from him to me.

"I dinna ken," she answered slowly. "I hae helped to bury mair than one in the kyne-yard behind, but—the Englishmon gied a blow for me, and I wadna hae him dirked in his sleep."

An idea came into my head.

"Your father lied when he said no bow-legged man came here this morning, didn't he?" I asked.

"Him that had the lassie wi' him?"

"Yes, that's the one," I said eagerly.

"Aye, himsel' was here."

"Do you know where he went from here?"

"Aye," she said, after a moment's hesitation.

"Where was it?"

"Why for wad ye ken?"

"He was carrying off the young lady against her will."

A curious light leaped into the girl's eyes.

"Wha' wad hersel' be to ye, Englishmon?"

I was conscious of a color in my face that I hoped the night would hide.

"She—why, she—she is the chief of my clan," I stammered.

"Clan? Yoursel' is nae a Highlandmon," she replied scornfully.

"That micht well be," interrupted David with the first show of impatience ever I saw him make, "but 'tis sober truth he is a member o' the clan."

"Is he, then?" she returned. "And wha' wull that hae to do wi' yoursel'?"

"Just this—that my errand wull be the same as his," said David.

Digitized by Google

She seemed to consider this, brooding in the shadows at the stair-head.

"If I tell ye wha' wull ye gie me?" she demanded abruptly.

"I'll pay you anything you ask," I answered quickly. "All that I have with me, and if that is not sufficient——"

"Losh, Englishmon, ye wull be ower-generous! Dinna tempt me to bide for the throat-cutterrs." She chuckled dryly. "Ye wad ken where Crooked Sawney wull hae carried the lassie?"

"Yes."

"Who wull be Crooked Sawney?" cut in David.

"The bow-legged mon."

"Aye, but who wull he be?"

"Ye dinna ken Crooked Sawney?"

She laughed a shrill, eldritch laughter, unbelievably low.

"He wull be one o' the best-kenned men in these glens," she went on, when David shook his head. "He wull be king o' the caterans on the Moor o' Rannoch."

This was evidently intelligble to David.

"That band o' lawless, clanless loons by Loch Ba?" he said.

"Aye, that wull be they."

"But I hae been tellet that Sawney is one o' Gairloch's men?" David pressed.

Again her uncanny laugh floated from the stair-head.

"Himsel' is one o' Gairloch's men, and one o' Argyle's, too," she answered. "Sawney turns a dishonest penny where he may. He wull do dirrty warrk for the Campbells and dirrtier warrk for Gairloch—as ye MacRosses micht ken by noo."

It seemed to me she bore with emphasis on this last insinuation, but in our interest in Sheila's fate neither David nor I heeded the point.

"You have been very kind," I said, jingling the coins in my sporran. "Now will you tell us where Sawney has taken Miss MacRoss?"

"I wull na tell ye for gowd," she replied coldly, and rose up in the stair-opening.

"What will you tell us for, then?" I asked desperately.

She answered, as if she had not heard me:

"Ye wull find the lassie in the caterans' hut on the Moor o' Rannoch, bechune Loch Ba and Loch Na Hachlaise."

"That wull be a lang day's journey frae this?" interposed David.

"Aye," says she, "but ye wad na gae there by your twa sel's?"

"Why not?" I returned. "And we have our two gillies."

"Fower o' ye! Wi' Crooked Sawney and his caterans waitin' for ye!" Her voice rose protestingly. "It wull be just mad ye are! Tak' a worrd o' advice, and gang back to your friends. Ilka minute ye stop here, ilka step ye tak' beyond, ye gang the closer to your dooms."

David went across the garret and shook the gillies awake. It was for me to answer her.

"I thank you for your advice, as well as for the great help you have given us," I said. "But 'tis impossible we should turn back."

She came from the stair-head and looked at me closely.

"Nae," she said, "ye wadna."

Then she turned and went down-stairs. When we descended we found her huddled by the hearth, a heap of bannocks and a whisky-jug set ready.

"Ye wull hae some minutes till himsel' wull be back," she announced shortly. "Tak' a sup whiles ye may."

PRESENTLY she left us and went out to the stable hut, returning with the two ponies, which she led straight into the room.

I offered a guinea to her, but she refused it.

"I dinna want gowd," she said stubbornly.

"Well, can you not take it for a token of gratefulness?" I persisted.

"There wull be aplenty tokens o' that ilk," she replied, with a burst of her strange, shrill laughter.

After we had finished the bannocks and drunk as much of the whisky as we dared, she produced a length of rope.

"What for hae ye that?" inquired David.

"I mislike to hae ony blame o' the death o' the twa o' ye on my soul," she answered grimly. "Tie me up to the stairs, harrd and fast, and whiles himsel' comes and speers where are ye, I'll just say ye cam' doon on me after he ganged oot, and ye bound me and rode awa' in a fricht, sayin' ye was for Sterrlin'. At the least, it wull save ye that mony enemies."

"I'm thinkin' ye wull be an unco douce lassie," said David, kindly for him, as he started to tie her to the stairs.

Digitized by Google

She paid no attention to him.

"Englishmon," she said, "why wull ye nae help put the ropes on me?"

"I will, if you want me to," I said, and I sprang to relieve David at the work.

He had bound her hands behind her back and her ankles. Now, I proceeded to truss her body, so that she could not rise from a sitting position.

"Gar the door open," she called over my shoulder to David.

He turned to obey her, and she whispered to me with fierce earnestness:

"Englishmon, ye said ye wad gie me wah' I asked o' ye?"

"Yes," I said.

"Gie me a kiss, then. Nae, lad, dinna be feared. So, on the lips. It wullna hurrt ye."

She sighed deeply, as I touched her lips.

"An honest mon's lips wull be bonnie," she said. "Wull ye—laddie, ye hae paid your bargain, but wull ye——"

I stooped and kissed her again. When David came back from leading out the ponies she was saying:

"Be watchful as ye gang to Rannoch. Keep awa' frae the common tracks. They wull be spied on. Come doon on the moor by way o' Ben Creachan, frae the norrth, and bide your time. Dinna be hasty."

David went up to her, a troubled look on his face.

"Lassie," he said, "ye hae been by-ordinar' guid to us. I doot we shouldna leave ye here. Is there naught——"

"Ye wull be servin' me by puttin' a lang road bechune yoursel's and this ere daylicht," she interrupted. "Gang your ways, and dinna waste a thocht on a tavern lass."

David awkwardly patted her back.

"We wull gie mony a thocht to ye," he replied, "and if we come this way again we wull see ye, mayhap."

"Aye, if ye do," says she. "Guid-by to ye, Englishmon."

"Good-by," I said.

I looked back as I shut the door. She was sitting on the stairs, with the rope all round her and her eyes glowing in her wan face. She was no more like the unkempt slattern that had spilled the whisky-jug than a Madonna on a church wall. She smiled at me, and I hope I smiled back. I felt more comfortable when I was outside in the darkness, and David was speaking to me.

"Dod," says he, "I clean misremembered to speer the lassie's name!"

"This is no time for asking names," I interfered before he could dismount from his pony. "We must get out of the village. To wait might mean a fight, and a fight would mean delay."

"Ye wull be richt," he assented reluctantly. "But I wad gie muckle to ken the breed o' that dog wad hae murdered us."

"'Twould do you no good at the present, when we have other business toward. Moreover, you will not help his daughter by hanging him."

"I misdoot he was a Campbell," snapped David. "Campbells are wi'-oot the law these times. As for the lass, he'll kill her yet. She micht be better off wi' any than her dad."

I felt that David's knowledge of Highland character and politics was far too intimate to warrant an argument with him, and we rode on silently through the night.

In a few minutes we passed the last of the straggling houses of Killin, and struck up the valley of the River Lochay in a westerly direction. We marched as fast as we could, and the sun had not yet risen when we crossed the icy stream at a waist-deep ford and plunged into the recesses of the great Forest of Mamlora on its farther bank.

David and the two gillies knew this country fairly well, as it was in a bee-line between them and their own homelands. They steered by the frosty stars a path that led us clear of the foot-tracks that were the usual means of communication across these vast Highland wastes, tenanted only by the red deer and the cateran. In the forest depths Evan discovered a shallow cave, a rugged heap of boulders partly roofed over, and here we halted to build a fire and dry ourselves.

In truth, we needed rest, for our pace had been relentless. Even giant David bore grooves of fatigue in his iron face. We built a heaping fire of dried wood that made no smoke, and then watched by turns whilst the others undressed and rubbed down. After that we drank more whisky from our flasks, and slept three at a time, one always keeping watch. In the late forenoon we set forth again, drawing our belts about us, for all we had to eat was a handful of crumbly bannocks.

Our way led across the flanks of Meall Ghaordie, and so through Mamlora to the

Digitized by Google

River Lyon. We crossed this stream with little difficulty, and headed to the northward of Ben Creachan, now looming before us. Not once did we see a living soul. The virgin forest stretched on every side, always lonesome and desolate. Several times the deer showed themselves, and the gillies would have shot at them, but David forbade it, fearing, rightly, that the echoes of the report might warn our enemies.

It was nigh evening, when we stood on the shoulder of Ben Creachan and saw the Moor of Rannoch spread out far below us. In the foreground wound a silver streak, which David said was the Tulla Water. Beyond two patches of different size were the twin lakes, the larger, to the north, Loch Ba, and the smaller, almost due south of it, Loch na Hachlaise. From the mountain we stood on, the rolling expanse of the moor swept away toward a distant line of hills on the far horizon, purpled with the setting Wintry sun. It was a harsh landscape of snow, heather, icy meres, savage mountains and black forests.

"It wull be bad country," said David, sensing the thought in my brain as we stood side by side. "God cursed it in the making, they say. Nae honest mon dwells here. It wull be a hidey-hole for caterans, rievers, landless men, ootlaws and others that hae been put to the horrn."

"I believe you," I said fervently. "And Sheila is alone with such!"

David winced.

"Aye," he said steadily, "we maun gang on wi' it the nicht. Nae time for any foolish ploys."

"Do you know where is this hut of Crooked Sawney?"

His keen eyes plotted the moor yard by yard. Then he pointed.

"Yon—this side o' the little loch. Nae, to the richt."

I saw a tiny patch of white cuddled down in the heather, and as I looked closer a feathery plume of smoke curled up from one end of it.

"She will be there," said David impassively.

Indeed, she could be nowhere else, for the most careful survey of the hundreds of square miles of mountain and moor around us failed to disclose another sign of human habitation.

We had found the rievers' hut. My pulses beat faster. The thought of failure did not enter my mind. I knew we could not fail.

CHAPTER XIV

THE FIGHT IN THE RIEVERS' HUT

FROM our right hand came the lapping of the waters of Loch Ba, hidden by the purple shadows that filled the great bowl of Rannoch Moor. 'Twas past midnight, and the silence of that isolated place was almost unbelievable. The slip of a foot, the sighing of the wind in the trees, the steady murmur of the waters on the sedgy margin of the lake—all these noises were magnified a thousandfold.

David had elected to approach the rievers' hut by a route that fetched a half-circle around the moor, so that we might elude any lookouts the outlaws had posted on the paths over Ben Creachan; but it was still necessary to practise infinite caution, for our chance of success rested upon complete surprise.

It must have been a half-hour after we began to steer our course along the shore of the northern loch that David's cat-like eyes spied a faint beam of light, slicing the thick, furry darkness ahead of us.

"Is that the hut?" I whispered in response to his pressure on my arm.

"Ay, we daurna tak' the nags closer."

He and I went on, leaving the gillies to follow. We had advanced several hundred yards, and the gillies had just caught up with us, when a second and wider beam of light flashed out from the mysterious hut. The clear, cold atmosphere carried to us distinctly a snatch of hiccuping, drunken laughter, horribly ghastly in that eerie setting of desolate moors and tarns.

I stopped dead with a shudder.

"What is that?" I asked.

Simultaneously a shadow barred the broad patch of light and a door slammed shut, cutting it off altogether.

"The warrk o' the de'il in fu' blast," retorted David, and he set off at a run.

"Ye wullna need to be carefu' o' noise noo," he called over his shoulder. "They wull be ower-busy wi' the whisky-jug yon."

We ran blindly, careless of obstacles. Once I fell and picked myself up, pausing only to make sure of my pistols and claymore. 'Twas David, breathing hard, who halted me some few yards short of the single

Digitized by Google

tenuous shaft of radiance that escaped from the gloomy walls of the hut. Maudlin song and raucous talking were plainly audible.

"Gar saft," David hissed in my ear. "We wull hae a peek at the gomerils by their ain firelicht."

With utmost care we stole through the shadows to the unshuttered window. There was no glass in it, and as soon as as our eyes had become accustomed to the bright glare we had no difficulty in discerning the main features of the scene within.

The hut was large and seemed to contain several rooms. That we looked into was the outer chamber. A fire was burning on the hearth, and about it sat as choice a collection of ruffians as ever lived by crime. Torches were stuck in rude brackets, and every detail of their savage faces was revealed. There were ten or a dozen of them, all in Highland costume, needless to say, but indiscriminate as to tartan. With my new-won clan lore, I picked out the Campbell, Gairloch, MacGregor and several strange clan colors.

" A braw gathering o' broken men," muttered David.

Sheila our eyes searched for in vain. But Bow-legs occupied the center of the group. There was no mistaking the man. He was exactly as he had been described to us—absurdly straddle-gaited, with a cast in one eye and a single black forelock that was plastered down his clammy white forehead and added the last touch of incarnate evil to a face that bespoke the farthest depths of ferocity and sin.

Whilst we looked he beat for order with a pistol-butt upon the hearth beside him.

"Hae done, ye witless clabber-jaws," he bellowed. "I wull gie ye ane sup the mair all round. Wi' that ye maun bide. I canna hae a crew o' drunken sots to guarrd the grandest prize we hae ta'en this lang syne."

"Hoot, mon Sawney," grumbled a giant in Campbell tartan, "isna the warrk done the noo? Whyfor should oursel's be gangin' dry, wi' a rich stack o' Geordies to put in our sporrans? We hae the lassie safe. Wha' mair wad ye be wishfu' for?"

A red-haired little Highlander, also wearing the Campbell tartan, spoke up shrilly in the Gaelic at this, and half a dozen others chimed in, until Bow-legs—or Crooked Sawney—silenced them by firing his pistol into the fire-logs, with a noise and smoke and scattering of coals that created a small panic before everybody was convinced that the bullet had not been discharged with murderous intent.

"Ay, we micht hae the lassie safe enough," he answered when he could make himself heard, "but we dinna ken yet wha' wull be done wi' her."

"Didna yon messenger gie ye the worrd?" demanded the Campbell man, pointing to the red-haired Highlander.

"He gied me the worrd frae Inveraray," said Bow-legs, "but I hae still to hear frae the auld Laird at Stroan."

The Campbell drew himself up, drunkenly bellicose.

"Its verra plain to see ye are unlearrned in some things," he said cuttingly. "Isna it kenned in Glen Stroan or these parrts that a worrd frae Inveraray is all the same as a worrd frae the king himsel' in his grand palace in London town?"

Crooked Sawney made no threatening move against the man. He just looked at him.

"I wull nae be just acquent' wi' all the learrnin's in Campbell heads," he answered softly. "But I can tell ye this: in these parrts the worrd o' the auld Laird gangs farrther nor the worrd o' Argyle—ay, or o' the king, himsel'. And for the matter o' that, so does the worrd o' Crooked Sawney —as some o' ye ken fine."

The Campbell man shrank back on his hams, and swigged a mouthful of whisky. His comrades became suddenly quiet.

"I wull ken that fine, Sawney," he said hurriedly, wiping his mouth with the hairy back of his hand. "Ye wullna be danderred at a wee plaguin'—foreby it was nae more nor the friendliness o' a mucklewame o' whisky."

Bow-legs made no reply, but the Campbell man seemed to be satisfied, and presently rolled over on the floor and went to sleep. He was a good bit more drunk than any of the others. I never saw a man go to sleep so fast.

David nudged me.

"Noo wull be the time," he said.

AS I turned from the window, stepping back so that Evan could take my place, I cast a parting glance at Crooked Sawney. He was staring abstractedly into the fire, a powder-horn and bullet-pouch on his lap, as he

Digitized by Google

refilled his empty pistol. His face even in repose was hideously sinister. This was partly due to his goggled eye, but the unnatural pallor of his skin, the slimy, inky blackness of his hair and his expression of latent cruelty had as much to do with the effect.

At the entrance to the hut we paused, and I ran my hand over the framework of the door. It hung loosely, but the heavy timbers were firm bolted within.

"I doubt you can force it," I whispered to David.

"Gie me room," he replied betwixt gritted teeth.

He drew his claymore, and then backed away.

"Ready," he said, and hurled himself forward.

In the same breath, I shouted:

"MacRoss! A rescue! MacRoss! Claymore!"

At the window the muskets of the two gillies roared mightily in the shattered silence of the moor. A babble of shouts and cries answered from the hut.

The door hung precariously by its upper hinge and the middle bolt, and David launched himself at it again. The hinge gave, and he was carried by the momentum of his own rush head over heels into the midst of the outlaws. I ran after him, cutting right and left with my claymore at every head I could reach.

Fortunately for us, the room was full of smoke, and in their bewilderment the rievers at first did not know friend from foe. I helped David to his feet in time to meet a couple of vague figures that leaped out of the reek, and we stood there, back to back, fighting as best we could with target and claymore. For a minute or two we made headway, but from the rear of the mêlée rose the cold, hard voice of Crooked Sawney:

"Stand, for your necks, ye fules! Gie 'em ——! There wullna be a mony o' them. Oot dirrks! Dirrks wull do your business."

Under the lash of their leader's tongue, the outlaws attacked us in a solid group. Claymores and dirks flickered down from the smoke like lightning from a thundercloud. I took a thrust in the flesh of my arm to save my body; David shook the blood from a head gash out of his eyes.

Despite our desperate resistance, we were driven back to the door. Then came the accession of strength we sorely needed.

"MacRoss! MacRoss! A rescue! Claymore!" rose the cry, and our two gillies charged valiantly to our aid.

They fired their muskets into the crowd, as David had planned, and closed with claymore and dirk. Four now, instead of two, we fought our way steadily forward, and as we advanced the fight became a series of separate combats. Several of the rievers were down for good. Others dodged around us, and fled out upon the moor.

The one desire that animated me was to get to close quarters with Crooked Sawney. With this end in view, I left my comrades and worked slowly through the swaying, cursing mob, but the smoky light of the torches failed to reveal his evil features in any part of the room.

I was still looking for him when I encountered the Campbell giant, who had awakened from his brief drunken slumber startlingly refreshed. To complicate matters, a second outlaw joined him immediately and hovered near, endeavoring to assail me in flank.

"Do ye slit him in the weem, and I wull dunt his head!" howled the Campbell man.

Whilst the big fellow kept my claymore in play, his mate would crouch in close and try to stab up under my target that was all I had to ward him off. Thrice he tried this trick, the Campbell man hammering away at my head, and I was near sick from the frantic effort to ward off the ceaseless stream of blows, when a rift in the smoke showed me a corner of the room close at hand.

Here was my chance. With what strength I had left, I brushed aside a claymore stroke and leaped lightly sideways to escape the deadly dirk—for my left arm by now was too weary to raise and lower the target quick enough to guard body and groin at once. Then I slipped into the corner, my confidence regained as I dropped the target and seized a pistol.

The Campbell man and his ally came at me together, milling with their blades, seeking to cut me down by sheer weight of steel. But I shot the giant before his claymore could bring sparks from mine—how I blessed mine uncle for those handy weapons that tucked in a pocket easy as a purse and carried death as sure as a musketoon!—and the second man tripped over him, yelling with pain as I slashed his sword-arm.

Digitized by Google

I looked to see this fellow make for the entrance door. But not he. With two others who scurried out of the smoke, David and Evan close behind them, he ran through a second door in the rear wall of the room. The last man shut the door in our faces and endeavored to hold it so. But his efforts were useless against David's mighty thews.

I entered in time to take a parting shot at a figure that was scrambling out of an open window. This room was clear of smoke and there was nobody in it but the man who had tried to shut the door on us. He was stunned by the fall he got when David tossed him aside.

"Hae ye seen Sheila?" asked David anxiously, as he mopped the ragged cut over his eye.

"No," I said, and with a sinking of my heart, added: "nor Bow-legs."

David started.

"That wull be richt," he growled.

He summoned Evan and the second gillie to search the front room. Five or six bodies lay on the floor, but not one of them was Crooked Sawney's. The scanty furniture and bare walls defied any attempt at concealment. Crooked Sawney had vanished, and with him, apparently, had gone Sheila.

It was too bad. Despair settled down upon me, and David was in scarce better plight.

"We maun mak' siccar," he said doggedly. "Wha' do ye see?"

In response to this suggestion, I looked around the inner room. It was as bare as the outer room. There was no fireplace. In the walls on either side were windows, both open now. The door we had entered through pierced the third wall. The back wall was blank.

I shrugged my shoulders.

"We might dig," I said.

But David shook his head after tapping tentatively at the hard dirt floor with his claymore hilt.

"There wull be naught beneath," he asserted.

THEN his eyes lighted on the outlaw he had overthrown, who stirred as consciousness began to return.

"Water," David called peremptorily.

Evan brought it, together with a jug of whisky.

David very skilfully applied a considerable swallow of the liquor to the man's lips, next swashed the water over him and lastly placed a claymore-point against his throat.

"It wull nae be ma desire to kill ye," he remarked placidly, "but if ye dinna tell me wha' I speer ye—and be gey sure it is the truth—I promise ye on ma bans ye wull hae fower inches o' honest steel stickin' out o' your dishonest hide."

The riever on the floor blenched visibly under this threat. He babbled something in the Gaelic.

"Speak English, if ye can," ordered David.

"Ay, shentlemons," stammered the man. "Hersel' wad nae kill puir Jock."

"I wad kill ye in a minute, Jock, if it suited ma convenience," rejoined David. "Noo, tell me. Where went Sawney?"

The man's eyes rolled about.

"Oot yon."

He raised an arm and pointed to the right-hand window.

"How lang syne?"

"It maun hae been when ye gared run back on to us after we pushed ye to the door."

"Ye speak the truth?" David's eyes bored the man.

"Aye," he said, trembling.

"Where wull be Miss MacRoss?"

"Wha' do ye say?"

A cunning look crept into the outlaw's eyes. David saw it as well as I, and the point of the claymore was driven with merciless precision a full quarter-inch into the man's throat. He shrieked for mercy.

"Noo wull ye tell the truth?"

"I haena tolt ye aught but the truth!" wailed the man.

"Oh, hae ye nae? And where is Miss MacRoss, then?"

The outlaw rolled out of reach of the bloody claymore tip.

"I dinna ken," he cried. "I dinna ken. Wha' wad a puir Highlandmon ken o' Miss MacRoss?"

David's face took on an expression which was not pretty.

"Chisholm," he said, "ye wull nae like wha' I wull do to this cateran, but dinna say aught. He maun suffer for a liar. Gie me your dirrk."

I handed over the weapon, and David bent down to his victim.

"Wull it be a slit nose or an ear off?" he asked gently.

Digitized by Google

"Oh, dinna cut me!" shrieked the outlaw. "I wull tell ye all! I wullna lie to ye, shentlemons! Oh, Englishmon, dinna let the tall mon cut me!"

David stood back.

"And where is Miss MacRoss?" he repeated.

The riever raised himself on his elbow, and pointed to the blank rear wall.

"Wad ye trifle wi' me?" David's voice boomed with anger, and his dirk flashed out again.

"I wull be tellin' ye the truth, the sair honest truth," protested the outlaw. "She wull be in yon."

At this I saw what he meant, and sprang for the wall.

"To the richt, Englishmon," he directed. "Noo—press harrd."

I pressed on the wall, and it swung in, revealing a black hollow dug in a swell of the moor, against which the hut was built. It was cluttered with boxes, bales and plunder of various kinds.

"Who is here?" I cried. "Sheila, are you here?"

A muffled murmur answered me.

I started to run toward the sound in the gloom, and fell over a long bundle that wriggled and squeaked as I landed on it.

"Here she is!" I exclaimed. "Oh, David, here she is!"

I snatched up the bundle in my arms and ran back into the semi-darkness of the hut. David looked at me almost stupidly.

"Wull it be Sheila?" he asked.

But his eyes pounced on a telltale lock of blue-black hair that straggled from the filthy wrappings, and a sob of joy burst from his lips.

"Aye, it wull be she!" he reassured himself. "Oh, mon Chisholm, she isna hurrtit?"

I put her down on the floor, and with hasty, clumsy fingers we undid the plaids and ropes that bound her. She was stiff with cold and confinement, and wan and very tired; but the moment I tore the wicked gag from her mouth she smiled up at us and strove to speak.

David brought water whilst she leaned against my shoulder, and moistened her poor, swollen tongue until she could twist it awkwardly around a few syllables.

"You will be fine knights any chief may be proud of," she said, giving a hand to each.

The tears welled in her eyes, and as for David and me—well, David looked away and I squeezed her hand.

"And I will not even be holding malice against Frank for the kick he gave me in the dark," she continued, with her old mocking smile. "Tho' my bones do ache from it."

"Are ye hale?" demanded David gruffly.

"If Frank has not crippled me."

"We wull hae nae time for havers. Can ye walk, Sheila?"

"I can try."

"It wull be only to where we hae the ponies. We maun gang soon or the caterans wull be back wi' some o' their friends belike."

And so we left the rievers' hut. As we rode away, the dawn was paling the eastern sky, and the squawking of water-birds over Loch na Hachlaise sounded like mourners keening the fallen. Rannoch Moor was as desolate and lone as it had been when we looked down upon it the evening before from the shoulder of Ben Creachan. Atop of one of those rolling swells in the moor that curtain the lower skyline, we all turned for a last look. A slender line of smoke ascended peacefully from the chimney of the hut.

"We wad best burrn the place doon," said David, and he began to retrace his steps.

But Sheila put her pony across his tracks.

"You would be clean mad to do that," says she. "It would be no less than a sign to any enemies we may have in twenty miles. And it was yourself said we had no time for havers."

"Aye," returned David reluctantly. "But I'm wishfu' there was more nor the chimney smoking."

CHAPTER XV

A WARNING FOR THE MASTER

DAYLIGHT found us scaling a trackless pass over the Grampians betwixt Ben Creachan and Ben Achallader. Sheila nodded in her saddle, David or myself walking beside her to keep her from falling. We were wary of pursuit, but fortune aided us, and early in the forenoon we entered the shadowy depths of Mamlora, where, for the first time, we dared risk a halt.

We were too exhausted to care for anything save sleep. David did undertake to

Digitized by Google

kindle a fire, but he confessed afterwards he dropped off at his task. In the lee of some rocks, sheltered from the mountain winds, we slept the clock around, and then Evan shot a deer and we fared nobly on venison and meat broth, with the last crums of our bannocks.

"And what will my new captors be doing with their prize?" asked Sheila after we had done full justice to the repast.

"Take you back to Stirling as fast as we may," said I. "Shall we not, David?"

He grunted assent.

"But first," I hastened to add, "we desire an account of your adventures. Did you learn Gairloch's aim in kidnaping you?"

Sheila looked grave.

"It is a matter we might just as well be settling now as at the long end of the future," says she. "There was no mention made of Gairloch in my hearing."

David interrupted her with what sounded much like an oath—in the Gaelic. At any rate Sheila covered up her ears.

"Oh, David! What a word!"

"But ye wullna be simple enough to hold——"

"Was I saying I held to that view?" she retorted. "I am not that much of an innocent, David MacRoss! But the fact I will be dinging into your thick lugs is that there was no mention of Gairloch in my hearing. Will you not see my meaning?"

"Why for, then, did they tak' ye?"

Sheila considered.

"I had little speech with any of them, but it is my thought they aimed to force me to wed with the Master."

"Wha' else?" sniffed David with an air of contempt. "Wullna that be wha' I was speerin' at?"

"Aye, just so, but there is no peg to hang it on, and that is my meaning."

She appealed to me.

"Oh, you will see it, Frank! When we go back there must be no talk of Gairloch's part in this. There is not the shadow of a proof. The Master would say, if we accused him, that he cannot be responsible for the actions of a band of broken men in times like these—and many of the gentry would agree with him. It would only make for bad feeling, and more of our men would die in brawls."

"But," interposed David stubbornly, "there was talk o' takin' ye to Argyle at Inveraray or to Stroan. We hearrd that."

"Maybe so." Sheila shrugged her shoulders. "I heard some such talk. They were uncertain where the Gray Fox holed—and there were some thought I would fetch a grander reward in Inveraray. Sawney was willing to try the idea but when the answer came I was to be brought in a state prisoner—and no mention of reward—he was all for awaiting word from Stroan. And I say again you can not bring aught home to the Master in this ploy. He was too clever."

"*Aaauggrrhh!*" rumbled David in his throat. "Wad ye tell me the chief o' a clan can be taken in broad day, wi' a kenned clan feud unsatisfied, and soberr men wad believe the chief o' the opposite clan didna hae a hand in it?"

Sheila smiled at him.

"Aye, David, like enough," says she. "But what will the Master say to that? He will say that he will be more sorry than he can tell us of, but he has a wicked old father will be sticking to the king, and it is not fair to hold him responsible for what the old laird does. Oh, David, you cannot find a loophole to strike at him through—not yet. Wait, and we will talk it over with Ian Dhu. You will see he looks at it this way."

"That is true," I agreed. "We cannot escape the fact that in all this adventure we have not once stumbled on the Master's name."

"Aweell," returned David, still not entirely convinced, "there wull be one more thing I wad speer ye. Wha' was the story the bow-legged mon told ye to get ye awa' wi' him?"

Sheila flushed to the roots of her hair.

"Oh, that was a matter of no importance," she replied, rising to her feet, "and we should be starting our journey, David, if we——"

"Ye show an onaccountable deeficulty at answering me," he said, plainly hurt.

Sheila looked confused.

"Why—why—it was naught," she protested. "Indeed, and it was naught. He—he——"

"Ye wull be makin' it a muckle," David grimly advised her.

"He—he just said—he said that—that a friend of mine had—had been shot from the castle—and I—was wanted to—to care for him," she stammered. Then added with a rush: "And if you think it strange I went when I was told such a story I—I—you will be more unkind than I believed you to be."

Digitized by Google

"Humph," said David, and got up to saddle the ponies.

He left us alone by the fire, and as much to tease her as for any other reason I took up the quizzing.

"Sheila," said I, "why do you not say who was the man spoken of?"

She flushed again.

"You and David will be as curious as two old luckies," she snapped. "Must you have every detail that will have no concern for you? I am somewhat well-kenned in these parts, and there are a few-score gentlemen, for my sake or my father's, would maybe ask my help if they were hurted. You will have to just do with that, Mr. Frank Chisholm."

And she leaped up, her eyes blazing through threatening tears.

"I meant no harm," I pleaded laughingly. "Sure, Sheila, you would not hold it against me that I poked a little fun at you. 'Tis you are making a monstrous big mountain out of a civil question."

But she would not relent.

"It will not be a civil question to ask that which another wishes not to answer," she retorted. "And—and—you——"

The tears were more than threatening now, and I fled to help David with the ponies. He had been a witness of my defeat from afar.

"Lassies wull be unco contrary creatures noo and then," he observed.

I agreed with him, but we had gone only a few miles on our journey south before Sheila recovered her spirits and our talk was put back upon its former footing. We traveled by forest-paths through Mamlora, in preference to the main road by Killin, lest more pitfalls might have been set for us by the Master and his hirelings. We held well to the west of Ben Dheiceach, and camped that night in a cave on the craggy sides of Ben More, after crossing Glen Dochart, where a shepherd assured us there had been no signs of the caterans.

NEXT day we continued southward, circled the west end of Loch Voil and traversed the famous Pass of the Trossachs betwixt Loch Katrine and Loch Vennacher. Some five miles beyond the Pass, we came to an inn on the outskirts of Aberfoyle, where we passed our first night under cover since we had bidden farewell to that ill-omened den of thieves at Killin. By mid-afternoon of the third day we plodded into Stirling, footsore and weary, the Prince's cannon and the castle batteries playing us a stirring marching-tune.

'Twas not yet dusk when the MacRoss sentries outside St. Ninians caught sight of us, and brought the clan tumbling into the street with their mad shouts of joy. With Ian Dhu and a score of the strongest dunnie-wassels at their head, they rushed up the road to meet us. Sheila they plucked from her horse as though she were so much thistledown, and put her on two men's broad shoulders. Then the first thing I knew Ian Dhu's stern face was peering up into mine and his hands were digging into the flesh of my waist.

His eyes shone with a strange, misty light, and he muttered to himself in Gaelic, but almost at once he shook his head, the light dimmed and he cried in his rough English:

"Ye wull be a mon the clan can be proud o'! Ian Dhu says it! Englishmon or nae, ye wull be a mon o' your hands. Ho, MacRosses!"

His voice rose in a splendid roar that beat down the cheering medley of voices all about us. The clan paused in its forward march, swayed to a halt and gathered close.

"Tak' notice, MacRosses," he shouted. "Ye wull hae a new leader in warr. He wull be nae langer a Sassanach."

Five hundred voices bellowed, five hundred claymores flicked from sheaths and clanged against upraised targets. And through it all I could hear the pipers on the edge of the throng shrilling "The Lass o' Slioch," which was the new clan march composed by Colin MacRoss, hereditary piper to The MacRoss.

"But 'twas David did all," I cried at the top of my voice that I might be heard in the din. "David MacRoss is a war captain you will not find in every clan. He rescued your chief."

At this those who could hear me yelled all the louder, but Ian Dhu lifted me out of my saddle by his grip on my waist and hoisted me on to his own shoulders, despite my resistance.

He waited until the confusion had died down, and then he said:

"It wullna be often ye wull see a mon wi' the blood o' the Chiefs o' MacRoss and him carrying an Englishmon on his back. Himsel' carries the Englishmon this time because

Digitized by Google

he wull be good as a Highlandmon and because he saved the chief."

The clan stormed forward again at this and Ian Dhu was in danger of being swept off his feet.

"That is plain nonsense you talk," I shouted in his ear. "I tell you David did it all."

Ian Dhu waved his hand impatiently.

"And wha' else was David do but gie all he could to the chief? What for wad he nae? His bluid, his life, his siller, his viarns —a mon gies all for his chief. But yoursel' wullna hae the bond o' bluid on ye. Forby ye hae risked all and savet her."

"But David——"

"David wull hae did wha' any mon o' the clan wad hae did. But ye—Chisholm, ye did wha' I wad hae did!"

That ended the matter. David, it seemed, deserved no encomiums by his exertions and achievements. His life belonged absolutely to his chief; his loyalty was taken for granted. But I, an outlander, having shared in some way his risks, was hailed as a hero because I had—well, I don't know exactly what I had done. Perhaps it was that I had proved an Englishman could fight like a Highlander.

A score of gentlemen of the clan clasped hands with me when Ian Dhu at last put me down. Men I did not know slapped me on the back and poured Gaelic into my ears. And after a while we formed a column and marched back into St. Ninians, with Sheila leading the way and the pipers skirling for all their lungs were worth.

At the door of her quarters Sheila made a little speech to them, standing very brave in her tattered plaid and kilts, with her blue-black hair falling in lovely masses about her cheeks. I do not remember it all, but she put a hand on the shoulder of David and myself, standing on either side of her, and at the end she said:

"I would have you remember there is to be no claymore-work coming out of this. So far as the clan honor is at stake you may be easy, for my champions here left a sore trail of death behind them. And I know it is not needful that I should say your chief will never be in like danger again."

A hoarse growl replied to this and the rattling of steel on steel.

"But guarding your chief does not mean making brawls with old enemies," she warned. "Have that in your memory, children of Clan Ross. Draw steel only when the chief calls upon you."

With this she dismissed them, and we sat down to supper and to discuss the situation. Ian Dhu wise old warrior that he was, promptly put his finger on the weak link in our case.

"If ye micht hae catched yon bow-legged mon we wad hae somewhat to tak befower the Prince," he said. "The loon wad ken his master. But wi'oot——"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"But wha' wad run awa' wi' our chief if it wadna be the Master?" demanded David fiercely. "It isna in reason that anybody else wad do sic a ranting deed beyond the law."

"Wha' talks o' law these days?" returned his father contemptuously. "Ye are just daft, Davy. Gairloch wad say wha' Sheila kenned he wad say—that it wad be the warrk o' the Gray Fox. Dinna forget the Prince wull hae need for every claymore still, and he wadna turrn awa' Gairloch's three hundred for naught."

He paused.

"Another point, the Master wull be strrong in favor wi' the Prince the noo. Some few days syne he drove his clan into the trenches to help the French sojers and the Irishers at digging the batteries. The other clans wull hae none o' sic warrk, and the Prince is verra gratefu' to Gairloch for helping him wi' the siege. Nae, it wadna be a guid——"

There came a knock on the door, and Sheila called to come in. The sentry thrust his head inside the crack, and gabbled something in a scared sort of way in the Gaelic. Sheila gasped.

"Are you sure?" she asked in English.

The sentinel nodded his head vehemently.

She looked whimsically at Ian Dhu and David.

"We have none of us been saying prayers to the devil, have we?" says she. "Certes——"

"What is it?" I asked, unable to restrain my curiosity.

"The Master is without," says she.

"What?"

"Aye, just so. He sends in word that he is come to see me on an errand of importance."

I took out one of my pistols and examined it carefully.

"Oh, he will not mean anything like that," said Sheila hastily. "Have no fear."

Digitized by Google

"Chisholm wull be richt," Ian Dhu rebuked her. "We canna be chancey wi' a snake."

He loosened his dirk in its sheath and adjusted his claymore hilt within reach. David followed suit.

"Well?" said Sheila. "What shall I say to him?"

"Have him in," I suggested. "By all means."

Ian Dhu and David assented to this dubiously, and Sheila gave the order to the sentry.

"The Master is to bring in one other with him—and no more," she added.

THE sentry withdrew and we stared at each other. Several minutes passed, and then we heard the *clump-clump-clump* of approaching footsteps in the narrow passage without. Another knock on the door, and again Sheila called to enter.

In walked the Master, and after him a young officer of the Prince's Life Guards, whom I had met several times, a Captain Daniel. He was one of the few Englishmen, besides myself, still attached to the army, and a man I did not care for, inasmuch as he always arraigned himself on the side of the intriguers against Lord George. He was an honest man, however, and in the present instance seemed at a loss to account for his position.

"A good evening to you, Miss MacRoss—and gentlemen," began the Master smoothly.

He went through the form of introducing his companion, and Sheila invited them to sit.

"It is not an ordinary pleasure to have your company," she said to Gairloch with a slight emphasis.

He inclined his head.

"I am aware that the history of our families stand between us," he answered in a voice pitched to the right note of melancholy. "But it has just come to my ears that you have suffered an attempt upon your person which you might feel disposed to trace back to me."

"I was kidnaped and rescued by my friends, if that is what you will mean," returned Sheila coldly.

"So I understand. I wished only to say that from word I have heard indirectly from Stroan it is quite possible my father, Lord Gairloch, planned such an effort to take possession of you. I wish you to know that I am not responsible for my poor, misguided father's plots. They are the cause of much sorrow to me."

"No doubt," Sheila agreed.

Gairloch waited a moment, then continued:

"As soon as I heard of the rumor in the camp, I came here to explain, in order that there might be no misunderstanding."

His blank, glaring eyes swept the face of each of us in succession, resting finally upon myself.

"I trust I have made myself explicit," he concluded.

Perhaps it was because he had focused his attention upon me that I answered.

"The explanation was the one, of course, that Miss MacRoss anticipated," I said. "Pray do not concern yourself, sir. The adventure happily had no fatal issue to any innocent parties, although another attempt upon her life or liberty will certainly bring quick retribution upon the person deemed responsible."

I spoke with a significance quite unescapable, and Gairloch had the grace to turn pale. I think he would have made a tart answer, but he remembered Captain Daniel's presence, and evidently feared to betray himself before his witness.

"That fulfils the object of my call, then," he said, rising. "I have the honor to wish you a good night."

He bowed low, Captain Daniel mutely imitating him, and they passed out.

Ian Dhu pinched my arm in his bear's-grip so that I winced.

"Wullna it be a peety the lad lacks MacRoss to his name?" he said, with unusual jocularity for him. "I couldna hae thocht o' a better answer masel'."

Sheila said nothing, but she gave me a shy look that was better than words.

Who, I wondered, was the man whose reported wounding had stirred her so deeply? 'Twas a question I resolved to ferret out for myself, but in sober fact things happened so rapidly during the following week that it slipped my mind until—but the future shall speak for itself.

TO BE CONTINUED

Digitized by Google

The Education of Mr. Giles

by RUSSELL A. BOGGS

Author of "The Last Wire," "The Old-Timer," etc.

HE HAD been an official too long, had Assistant-Superintendent Giles of the O. & R. Railroad. Rather, he had been an official too long in one position. Not that he had not had enough official titles; he had had three; but he had only held the one official chair.

The O. & R. was one of these pushing roads—a bustling road, too small to be classed in with the big trunk lines, and too proud to acknowledge that it was not so classed. So to cover the shortage in mileage they made efficiency their motto and adopted as their slogan: The Progressive Road. The O. & R's. stationery was all of a uniform color—a pale green—they published an employees' magazine; and—last and unforgivable—they made their station agents and operators wear blue uniform suits and caps.

This last had been established at the instigation and suggestion of Assistant-Superintendent Giles and partly explains the general antipathy with which the man was regarded by the men in the telegraph department—that being the department of which Mr. Giles had charge.

In the old days the division official who ran the telegraph branch was apt to be known as the chief dispatcher. Then times and custom changed and on some lines the title was changed to division operator; consequently Chief Dispatcher Giles—the O. & R., as has been said, being a progressive road—became Division Operator Giles, a new title but the same old job.

Then, directly, times and custom shifted another notch and a few of the most ambitious roads made the title that of assistant superintendent in charge of telegraph; and, of course, the O. & R., being an ambitious road, followed suit; hence Division Operator Giles became Assistant-Superintendent Giles—another new title but still the same old job.

Thus it will be seen that Mr. Giles, since joining the official ranks, had become the possessor of three official titles and one official office. And there were certain outspoken ones in the unofficial class who maintained that there had already been three too many of the former and one too many of the latter.

It may be, too, that this unofficial view of Mr. Giles was also secretly concurred in by those higher up; because Mr. Giles appeared to have been swept, so to speak, into a placid eddy where he merely whirled round and round in his office of onetime chief dispatcher, then division operator, and now assistant superintendent in charge of telegraph; a dour, gruff man he was, overbearing to those under him, out of sympathy with those above; a sad case.

From his official chair Giles had witnessed a long procession of men enter the service, climb to his level, climb above him, and on; an unending procession, vigorous and enthusiastic, that passed him, shunted aside, marooned in the one office he had ever attained. Probably this persistent ignoring had helped to sour Giles, had helped to make him more dour with the increasing years; for it is a fact that his disposition became no better as time passed.

Digitized by Google

As might have been expected, Giles's official habit of thought and conduct crept, inevitably, into his private life; and it reached its consummation one day in the unceremonious departure of his only son, a high-strung youth. This was a hard blow, and one that Giles jealously guarded, to the best of his ability, from outsiders and from his co-workers on the O. & R. Nevertheless, it was known to a few; and among these few it was no secret that the reason for the son's departure had been a refusal to longer abide the harshness of the father.

His son's going had a sobering effect on Giles for a few days; but the man was too stubborn to mend his ways, and in a little time he was back in the old rut again—if anything more unpleasant than ever.

Giles, in addition to his stubbornness, was a solemn man—that follows almost as a matter of course; he was totally devoid of a sense of humor or of the fitness of things—which was most unfortunate, because if there is one official who should possess both these virtues it is the man who has charge of a division telegraph department; for assuredly in no other branch of the service will there be found so large a percentage of employees who love to stick a pin in the bubble of officiousness.

To the average operator's care-free spirit an official is a man to be proved. If the official can win the respect of his operators, no more loyal set of men will be found. If he can not, they will bedevil him until life itself is irksome. This must be a secret fact, for so few telegraph officials seem to realize it; a small number—surprisingly small—though, do; wise men, these.

The operators on the Western Division—where Mr. Giles was stationed—of the O. & R. had labored painstakingly with their assistant superintendent. As an instance, there was the time on the first day of April when number three, the westbound mail, had been solemnly stopped at every block-station along the main line of the division, and then as solemnly had been handed a clearance with "April Fool" sprawled across the face of the sheet.

By the time number three arrived at the end of the division she had lost exactly one hour and twenty minutes, the conductor was a nervous wreck and the engineer was a raving maniac.

And Giles! When prompt tidings of the outrage came to Giles his helpless rage catapulted with such leaps and bounds that for days he was not fit to make a public appearance. What could he do? He didn't have twenty-five extra operators; he couldn't suspend all the offenders; he couldn't suspend one without discriminating. He did nothing except rage and threaten; which was exactly as his charges would have had it; their secret joy in the face of his impotent wrath approached absolute wickedness.

But the incident did not help any in the education of Mr. Giles. Perhaps the wit of it was not extreme; that does not matter. The point is, it was done for a purpose: The operators wanted to see; they saw. If Giles had accepted the matter diplomatically—if he had blandly ignored the challenge to his authority and had bowed gracefully to that which he could in nowise remedy, instead of blustering and threatening and then doing nothing—probably his charges would have relented somewhat.

But, as it was, the operators' proddings only increased, and things between them and the assistant-superintendent settled down into a steady cat-and-dog state; and it is difficult to tell if the education of Mr. Giles ever would have been completed if it had not been for the opportune arrival of Mr. Calvin Barnard.

IN THE course of his travels, Calvin Barnard, young and black eyed, tall and black haired, heard rumors that the O. & R. needed men. Therefore he shortly came to the headquarters of the Western Division of that road, arriving on a happy Spring day. The division offices were located on the upper floors of the big union depot, and Cal stepped into the lobby of the building to consult the directory board there.

As he stood looking over the names, two men — evidently railroad officials — approached each other from opposite directions and met close beside Cal.

"How are things moving on the division?" asked the one as they shook hands.

"Fairly well," replied the other, "fairly well."

"Saunders and Giles still at loggerheads?" questioned the first.

The second laughed shortly.

"You've said it," he answered.

The two moved off together.

Cal—who of course had overheard the

Digitized by Google

remarks—looked closely at the directory board. He saw the names: J. N. Saunders, Superintendent, Room 257, Second Floor, and L. P. Giles, Assistant-Superintendent, Telegraph, Room 369, Third Floor. Calvin smiled; all this sort of little information—such as he had just heard—was often useful; he made his way to the third floor and to the office of Mr. Giles.

The assistant-superintendent was seated at his desk, his back to the door, chewing away at the end of an unlighted cigar. Mr. Giles' head clerk, the only other occupant of the room, was seated at another smaller desk, busily tapping away at a typewriter; him Mr. Calvin addressed.

"I hear there's a chance to take on," said Cal. "Am I right?"

The clerk looked up sedately. His face was worn and thin—the result of much badgering.

"What do you mean—take on?" he asked with dignity.

"Sign up, agree to do this or that, fill out a form, make an application—any of those things—you know."

The clerk looked slightly uncomfortable.

"Operator?" he queried.

"Thanks, yes," said Calvin.

"Want a job?"

"Thanks, yes, again. If you've any left I'll have about one."

"I'll see."

The clerk turned to Mr. Giles.

"Here's a man looking for work."

Giles had already taken in every word. Pretense, though, was part of his system. He looked around, frowning; a frown and authority, in his conception of things, were inseparable.

"You an operator?" he demanded.

Railroad officials, great and small, were no new things to Cal. Many men who ruled the rails in many States had he known; therefore without the least difficulty or hesitation he placed Giles; his eyes flickered faintly.

"Alas, yes," he said apologetically.

Mr. Giles' frown deepened at the levity.

"And looking for work, eh?"

Cal smiled blandly.

"Well—a little work. If you've got something nice——"

Mr. Giles, tapping his desk in annoyance, interrupted.

"What can you do?"

"I can operate," said Cal with simplicity.

The clerk turned his back with a suspiciously choking sound. Mr. Giles glared.

"Carberry!" he said sharply, "give this man a set of forms to fill out."

"Yes, sir," said Carberry.

He pulled out a drawer of his desk.

The O. & R., as has been stated, was an efficient, up-to-the-minute road; hence the forms that Carberry laid before Barnard were many and varied. Mr. Cal had never seen more forms for one application. He seated himself at the opposite side of Mr. Giles's flat-top desk and looked them over. Once executed, a full and lucid history of the applicant's life from birth to present moment would be compiled. Mr. Cal scratched his head; he looked across at Mr. Giles.

"Here's an awful lot of forms," he said mildly.

Mr. Giles felt that he had borne enough. He stiffened in his chair.

"All right—if you don't like 'em leave 'em!" he snapped. "We can get along without you."

"Same here," said Mr. Cal promptly.

He got to his feet and went out.

Just outside the office door he paused a moment. Words reached him, coming through the open transom.

"That fellow's a fool!" he heard Giles declaim loudly.

Cal grinned and turned toward the stairway.

One flight down Barnard came across a door with the title he was looking for; Superintendent—Private. He peeked in.

SUPERINTENDENT SAUNDERS, newly appointed to his present eminence, was a youngish man who sometimes had difficulty in keeping his dignity on straight and who—as has been intimated—did not always approve of Mr. Giles and his methods. Mr. Saunders' eyes questioned the arrival at the door.

"I was just wondering," said Calvin, "if you needed any willing workers?"

He paused respectfully; this man suited him better.

Mr. Saunders, who at first had been inclined to resent this summary intrusion upon his privacy, regarded Barnard appraisingly for a few seconds; then humor suddenly flashed into his eyes and he chuckled.

Digitized by Google

"Come in and sit down and we'll consider the matter."

Saunders pointed to a chair.

Cal sat down.

"I'm open to all offers," he announced easily. "I'll tell you what, first: I'm an operator, a half-or-more baked agent and I've even braked some. Have you anything to put forward in any of these or other lines?"

Saunders sat back in his chair. Here was something new in the matter of applicants.

"Do you always go after a job in this manner?" he asked.

"Well," admitted Calvin reflectively, "not always. It depends a lot on the man."

His sober face suddenly wrinkled into an irrepressible grin.

The superintendent leaned forward with a hearty roar; with him, too, it depended a lot on the man; here was one.

"I'll be pleased to know your name!" he cried, "and all about you and when you can go to work."

"As far as the time is concerned," said Cal, "the sooner the quicker."

And he told Saunders his name.

They shook hands.

"We need an agent at Kildare, badly," said Saunders, "and we also need block operators—several of 'em. Now which would you prefer?"

"An agent's simple life," said Calvin, "has many hidden attractions that do not appeal to me. Myself, I'd rather join the block operators' corps. But I guess I'll take the agency at Kildare."

He sighed patiently.

Saunders eyed him keenly. This man kept him guessing; he felt there was something behind that patient sigh and those laughing eyes.

"Just as you say," acquiesced Saunders. He hesitated a second. "Still, why do you take it if you prefer the other?"

"Your Mr. Giles says he can do without me. Where is this Kildare?"

"When did Mr. Giles say that?"

Cal looked at his watch.

"About ten minutes ago—that would make it two-fifteen. What do you pay at Kildare?"

"You mean to say Giles turned you down?"

"Well, not exactly," said Calvin, replacing his watch. "What's the population there?"

"Oh, the devil!" exclaimed Saunders. "Come now—what was the trouble between you and Giles?"

So Cal related his interview with the assistant-superintendent and his clerk, word for word; and when he had finished Saunders sagged back in his chair. The superintendent struggled with his dignity for a moment, and then gave it up; he shook with laughter.

"I'll be dashed!" he choked. "Bless my soul!"

He grasped the arms of his chair weakly, muttering under his breath.

"I oughtn't to do this," he finally contrived, "bad for discipline and all that. I hope you'll not say a word of it to any one."

"You're safe with me," said Cal. "Now tell me something about this Kildare place."

"Kildare agency is a hot job," said Saunders, "it'll keep you moving. Kildare is thirty-five miles west of here, its population is about eleven hundred, it has one whip factory and one window-glass works and your station force will consist of one agent —yourself. Now, from your past experience, probably you can gather what I mean when I say it's a hot job, taking into account the facts I have given."

Cal nodded, apparently impressed.

" I should judge that you haven't overdescribed the case. Can I have a clerk?"

"You can," said Saunders, "as soon as the general offices O. K. my request; I've been trying to get it through for six months. That's why we can't keep a man at Kildare; they all get tired waiting for the clerk. You see, I'm not attempting to conceal anything."

"I seems not," agreed Cal. "Still, I said I'd take the place, so I'll go and give it a whirl. I need the experience, anyway, I guess."

"There's another thing, too," said Saunders. "Kildare, though not a block-station, is a telegraph job—it has the wires in. So you'll be under Mr. Giles' care."

"If Mr. Giles can stand it I expect I can," said Cal. He reflected a minute. "But he'll not like my coming here; he'll think I've sort of gone over his head."

"You should worry," returned Saunders. "But I guess you better go back up and see him and fill out those applications. I'll give you a little note."

"A little note might help," said Cal. "Let's do that."

Digitized by Google

Mr. Giles and his clerk, within a short time of Barnard's departure, were surprised to see him re-enter the assistant-superintendent's office.

"Back again," announced Cal cheerfully.

Mr. Giles requisitioned his official frown.

"Changed your mind, did you?" he said unpleasantly.

"Well, not just that." Cal smiled vapidly. "I was talking to Mr. Saunders and he changed it for you. He told me you were hard-up for an agent at Kildare, so I consented to come back and help you out. He seems like such a nice man. Here's a note."

The assistant-superintendent, inwardly boiling, took the extended slip. He read:

Please fix this man up for the agency at Kildare.
J. N. S.

Mr. Giles looked from the note up into Barnard's shining face. The assistant-superintendent's eyes glowed; his lips trembled with suppressed words of invective; plainly this going over his head was displeasing, mightily; plainly, too, it came close to the edge of the danger line. But the short, curt note left him no leeway, his course was clearly indicated.

"All right," he stuttered, "all right!"

He turned away to hide his chagrin.

"Carberry, give this man those applications again."

"Yes," said Cal brightly, "let's have another look at 'em."

MR. GILES, like most men of his stamp, had a long memory; therefore he did not quickly forget how Calvin Barnard had placed him in an unlovely light in Superintendent Saunders' eyes. It was characteristic of the man that it never occurred to him that the incident might call for anything but resentment, or that there might be anything else to do other than wait for a fitting time and place to vent his spite and to have his revenge.

Consequently it is small wonder that when the assistant-superintendent received a certain message from the general manager—a message that arrived a month after Barnard had been installed as agent at Kildare—he rejoinced silently. Mr. Giles contemplated the message with satisfaction:

Asst.-Supt. Giles:

In anticipation of the regular Spring inspection by the president and general officers, please make a personal preliminary inspection of all the telegraph offices and stations on your division in order to see that everything is in proper condition. This so there may be no unnecessary criticism of your department.

C. O. Prentiss,
Gen. Mgr.

A bigger man might have thought this personal investigation a time for bigger things than the dragging in of personal animosities; nevertheless, it is a fact that, for Giles, it was not. The vindictiveness with which he went into needless details on these investigations and the arrogance with which he chided those under him for unavoidable short-comings was positively astonishing; he left behind him a trail of harsh orders and harsh words—and in the hearts of his men he left swelling anger and a sense of the futility of ever being able to please.

Hence it is not strange that, in connection with the message and the prospective journey along the line, Mr. Giles should feel a subtle pleasure. There would be a thorough going-over and an asserting at Kildare; this man Barnard would be shown his place.

MR. CALVIN BARNARD had found Kildare to be all that Superintendent Saunders had claimed. From the whip factory he received many bundles of whips for shipment, and from the glass house he received many boxes of window-glass—all this daily. Life, in the agent's office at Kildare, was no merry song from morn till night, and no merry round of pleasure.

As the end of the first month drew near, Cal perceived that his waybills, covering his outbound shipments, would reach four hundred; and that his expense bills, covering his inbound freight, would go over seven hundred; and to one who knows these figures reveal that of both outbound and inbound freight he had a great plenty—for one man to handle.

Conditions at Kildare, Cal, upon his arrival, had found to be in a jam, to be sadly snarled, to say the least. The freight-house, adjoining the depot building itself, was a sight. The accumulated litter and refuse of years, apparently, had collected there; the floor was covered with a layer of spilled lime, flour, cement, grain and other

Digitized by Google

unguessable ingredients; excelsior and straw from crates and boxes were there, and parts of the crates and boxes themselves; the corners were crowded with refused and damaged freight—broken castings, broken chairs, broken ladders, broken wheel-barrows.

The freight, as it arrived, evidently had been thrown indiscriminately around the place, the articles for different consignees all jumbled together regardless.

Calvin took one long survey of the freight-house from the doorway. Then he carefully closed the door again.

"That'll all keep," he murmured, "till a later day!"

So he went back into the depot proper and regarded things there. By the appearance of this place, too, things had likewise been keeping—for some time.

Now in the interval between the departure of the last regular agent and Cal's arrival—a period of some two weeks—the relief agent had had charge of Kildare station. And relief agents, being more or less the personal representatives of the superintendent, are expected to keep things shining, to hump themselves, to be up-and-doing.

A littered freight-house, an untidy depot and a relief agent are, under ordinary circumstances, no more to be expected to constitute a sympathetic or synonymous trio than, for example, a Serb, a Bulgar and a Greek. Notwithstanding, here at Kildare was the first-mentioned paradox.

"If you leave it to me," observed Cal to the relief-agent, "I'd say she looks downhearted and discouraged."

The relief-agent was a shrewd man, and he was aware that two weeks of Kildare was enough for any ordinary person. Furthermore, he knew that if he went too much into details the incoming agent might grow discouraged himself and just up and leave without waiting for any actual experience. Such a thing had happened but the previous week, the applicant arriving on one train and departing on the next.

The relief-agent was himself figuring on departing on the next train; if he could once get the cash and accounts transferred to Barnard he'd be all right; until then, though, he'd play safe; so he muttered something unintelligible to Cal's observation and ended up with—

"Here—count this cash."

This remark was perfectly audible.

This cunning was not lost on Cal; but he had only grinned in silence and counted the cash, and, afterward, speeded the departing relief-agent on his way. Barnard had not been fooled much; he could read sign pretty expertly and he was pretty well aware of what he had let himself in for; nevertheless, he'd told Saunders he'd take the job.

"I can handle 'er for a month or so, anyway, I'll bet myself," cogitated Cal as he watched the train pull out with the relief-agent.

Then he went into the office, pulled off his coat, and pitched in.

Pitching in was right, from seven A.M. until eight-five P.M., when the last passenger train went. There were six daily passenger trains—three east and three west—and for each of the half-dozen he had mail, to and from the post-office. For the six trains he also had baggage and express, and for the early morning train east he also had daily thirty-five cans of milk, brought in from the surrounding country.

Between trains he busied himself with the shipments from the whip factory and from the glass house; with many other details too, of course—such as handling the two daily local freights and seeing that they did not slip away with their switching undone, attending to patrons, seeing that the draymen and teamsters got their proper freight—an endless string of duties.

At the end of the first week Cal wired Superintendent Saunders:

"I need that clerk. How about him?"

"No authority as yet. Will advise you promptly when received," replied Saunders.

The end of the second week came, and still no clerk. So the freight-house was still unswept and untangled, the windows of the waiting-rooms were still unwashed and the dust that had gathered on stationery cupboards and clothes-locker still remained undisturbed. The front windows of the office Cal did contrive to keep rubbed clean; this that he might keep a watchful eye on arriving trains; outside of that, if he managed to squeeze in a sweeping of the office and waiting-room floors every other day or so he called it good.

And by the end of the third week Calvin's desk was piled high with unanswered correspondence on one side and with unfiled tariffs on the other. Uncompleted over-short-and-damage reports stacked up on him, and

Digitized by Google

refused-and-unclaimed-freight forms; correction notices came to him, and tracers for shipments.

Cal grinned unworriedly as he daily added to the accumulation about; his hours were filled with the other imperative affairs: the waybilling freight, the expense-billing freight, the carrying of mail, the selling tickets, the checking baggage, telegraphing, making cash balances. He had no time for trifles. He'd never worked so hard on a job in his life, and what he did not accomplish did not bother him!

Then arrived the end of the first month, April thirtieth. Cal, still clerkless, came to the office at six A.M. that day, one hour before he was scheduled or required to go on duty. But on this day the monthly reports of railroad, express and telegraph accounts must be closed—a bugbear! Therefore he donated the extra hour, and pitched in!

The morning passed; Cal took twenty minutes for lunch. The afternoon wore on, and five o'clock came; that being the hour when the delivery and receiving of freight ceased for the day, Cal went out, closed and locked the freight-house, and returned to the office. The day was warm, and for better ventilation he let the office door stand open when he came back in and settled himself at the desk at the front of the office, cash-book before him.

For half an hour Calvin labored over his cash-book, undisturbed; then he laid down his pen and considered his figures. By tickets sold, monthly freight-accounts collected and other items he owed the O. & R. the sum of five hundred and seven dollars and twenty-six cents.

Cal arose, went to his cash-drawer and emptied it of bills, coins and some few checks for small amounts. The money and checks he spread on the desk by the front windows, obtained a remittance slip, and sat down.

A SLOW-MOVING eastbound freight dragged past the windows as Cal was counting the money and arranging it in neat piles according to class and denomination, and so intent was he that he did not notice a sly head projecting above the side of a gondola car in the train—a sly head whose eyes grew suddenly wide at what they saw through the office windows.

And so absorbed did Cal remain at his task that neither did he hear the outside door of the waiting-room open softly shortly after the caboose of the freight had gone by; nor was he aware of the silent figure that appeared in the office doorway.

"Put your hands up!" commanded a voice at Cal's back.

Cal, surprised, whirled around on his chair as he raised his hands. A handkerchief-masked man stood in the doorway, pointing a pistol.

"If it isn't a regular hold-up!" exclaimed Calvin, quite unfrightened after the first shock. He contemplated the robber coolly. "I'll bet you got off that freight," he observed.

The man with the pistol laughed shortly, a little nervously.

"Maybe," he admitted, advancing a step. "I'll have that cash." His pistol wavered from Cal to point at the money on the desk.

"Would you like me to wrap it up?" said Cal, playing for a little time. "That's quite a lot of money to carry around loose."

He had noticed the nervousness of the laugh and his eyes, imperceptibly, grew keen and alert.

"A new hand at the game," he silently resolved.

The masked man repeated his nervous little laugh and ventured a few more steps.

"Now don't you try to josh me," he said, making an effort at ease. "I guess I'll just take it as is."

He stepped closer to the front of the office, hesitantly.

Calvin, apparently reconciled, watched the hold-up man narrowly as he came close. The eyes behind the mask kept turning to the money. Cal shifted in his chair; rose to his feet. An expert would have prevented this; but this man made no protest by word or gesture. The pistol covered Cal waveringly and again the eyes shifted from the same angle. Such amateurism was so palpably rank that Calvin permitted himself a quiet smile.

The holder-up reached an uncertain hand for the money—and once more he allowed his gaze to swerve from Cal for an instant. Cal's fingers, swift and sure, closed over the fingers of the robber's pistol-hand! Calvin twisted, jerked—the pistol was secure in his own hand!

"I'll have this," said Cal quietly. His fingers caught the mask, ripped it from the would-be robber's face, and let it fall to the floor.

Digitized by Google

"Why, you helpless babe!" ejaculated Cal, staring into the eyes of twenty-years; he clucked his tongue reprovingly. "My good gosh! Did you really think you could get away with it?"

Twenty-year's face, where it was exposed between the streaks of grime, was white; his blue eyes were panic-filled.

"Aw, let me go!" he half-whispered. "Let me go! I never tried to do anything like this before!"

"You need not tell me!" exclaimed Cal, "Don't I know it! Why, you poor fish, your every move betrayed your ignorance."

He ran his hand over the other for more weapons, found none, and dropped the captured pistol in his own pocket.

"Now just why did you try this method of getting rich quick?" he demanded. "What made you start on me?"

"I was on that freight and saw you with the money through the window," said twenty-years, squirming. "I haven't a cent—I was desperate—and hungry."

Cal looked closely into the other's face. The cheeks were thin, and the whiteness of them, he perceived, did not all come from fright; he nodded.

"I've been hungry," he said simply; and there was so much of ready sympathy in the words that twenty-years seemed to be suddenly overwhelmed; he fell on to the chair beside the desk and dropped his face on his hands.

"Come on, buck up!" remonstrated Cal; here was a case. "Maybe we can straighten this thing out right good. Let's see, now. You might tell me where you came from, and whither bound."

The ex-robber did not look up or answer right away, and while he waited Cal heard an approaching engine whistle east of the station. Cal looked out the window, saw an engine and caboose draw up to the station, saw one man, Assistant-Superintendent Giles, hop off, saw Mr. Giles wave the engine and caboose on, and heard Mr. Giles shout to the engineer.

"All right!" shouted the assistant-superintendent. "Go ahead!"

The engine and caboose went on.

The voice of the assistant-superintendent penetrated into the office. The ex-robber, who had so far paid no attention to the arriving and departing engine, looked up swiftly as he heard the voice. He shot a glance out the window at Mr. Giles; then, his face tragically agitated, he looked at Cal.

"Looks like we're going to have Mr. Giles with us," Cal was commenting, smiling at remembrance of his former contact with the assistant-superintendent. "I hope no needless unpleasantness comes up or——"

He broke off short as he glanced down at the youth beside him and beheld his agitated features.

"Great Scott, man! What's the matter?" he cried.

"Get me out of this!" begged twenty-years. "Don't let him catch me! Get me out, quick! Can't you see——"

His hand clutched Cal's arm fiercely.

Cal, a little amazed at the other's vehemence, stared at him a second. The ex-robber, it was plain, was on the very verge of going to pieces.

"Here, here—buck up!" cried Cal reassuringly. "I'll not let 'em catch you just yet." He looked around swiftly. Giles was near the waiting-room door, coming in; retreat from the office was cut off. Cal considered quickly, then noiselessly closed the office door and flung open the door of the clothes-locker, at the rear of the office.

"Get in here!" ordered Cal.

Twenty-years instantly complied. Cal shut the door, locked it, and dropped the key in his pocket.

ASSISTANT - SUPERINTENDENT GILES rattled the office door peremptorily, demanding admittance; Cal swung it wide, smiling.

"Why, how do you do?" beamed Calvin cordially, as if Mr. Giles's coming was the one unexpected pleasure needed to round out a perfect day.

But thunder hovered on the assistant-superintendent's brow; here was no time for pleasantries; he flashed a stern eye over the somewhat-disordered office. Behind the mask of his frowning front the signs of untidiness were a joy to him—they afforded him excellent opportunities for condemnation; he'd been waiting all day for this!

"What kind of an office is this?" he demanded bruskly, sweeping his hand around to convey his contempt of the disarray made by the scattered account books, the stacks of unfiled tariffs and the miscellaneous assortment of reports and forms with which the desk and telegraph table were covered.

Digitized by Google

Mr. Calvin regarded the assistant-superintendent with sober astonishment, as if incredulous at his ignorance.

"Why, this is a railroad office," he said guilelessly. "And a right busy one, too, let me say," he added primly.

He didn't know why, exactly, but somehow every time he saw this man, Cal became possessed with an impish desire to see how stupid he could make himself appear; also he remembered that Giles had, to his clerk, designated him as a fool.

Mr. Giles gulped, hard. He glared into Cal's innocent, steady black eyes; his mouth worked impotently.

"You—you," stuttered the assistant-superintendent, chokingly.

He swung on his heel.

"Bring your keys!" he bellowed. "I want to look over your freight-house!"

Cal followed to the freight building, jingling his keys cheerfully; he unlocked the door and opened it. Giles stepped in, gave one look around, and let out a roar.

"I'll be dashed!" he raged, almost jumping up and down. "If this isn't the dirtiest most disgraceful-looking freight-house I ever saw!"

It wasn't any worse, in truth, than Giles had always seen it heretofore; but it pleased him to say it.

Mr. Calvin giggled deliciously, as if the whole thing were a tremendous joke.

"I'spose you've seen some pretty bad ones, too," he chuckled fatuously.

Mr. Giles picked up an old broom that was lying on the floor and, to ease his feelings, slung it savagely into a corner.

"Why don't you clean it up?" he stormed.

"I've only been here a month," stated Cal.

The assistant-superintendent hopped, literally, from one foot to the other.

"Only a month! You've been here a month and never made any effort to get this freight-house into decent condition?"

"I've been pretty busy," prodded Calvin.

"Busy!" Mr. Giles threw his hands up helplessly. "Busy! You don't know what it is to be busy!" The inference was, obviously, that Mr. Giles was the only one who ever was busy. "You could clean this place up in an hour or two," he snapped.

"Yes," admitted Cal, "I guess I could, only——"

"Only what?"

"Only I can't seem to find a loose hour or two."

"Well, you'd better find it!" Mr. Giles shook a threatening finger in Mr. Barnard's face. "Young man!" he cried," don't you know that the president and general officers will be along here in a day or so on an inspection trip?"

"No," replied Calvin with ready interest. "I hadn't heard that. Well, now! I don't know any of the boys from the general offices, but I'll be glad to meet 'em."

Mr. Giles fled from the freight-house. The easy familiarity, the irreverence of the expression, "Boys from the general offices," was too much for his official soul. He banged back into the depot, and when Cal followed a minute later he found the assistant-superintendent tearing old notices and placards from the waiting-room walls and throwing them viciously to the floor.

"Just look here!" exaimed Giles. "Just look at these old notices and things—all gone out of effect long ago!"

Cal unlocked the office door, leaned easily against the door jamb, and looked at the busy official. The assistant-superintendent desisted a second from his labors and fixed his scorching gaze upon Barnard.

"Don't stand there gawking at me and doing nothing, you blighted ignoramus!" he yelled, fairly beside himself. "Can't you see I'm trying to get this littered-up place into some kind of presentable shape? Get busy and do something, you fool!"

That was wrong—that was a mistake. As long as the assistant-superintendent had made no particularly personal applications in his thoughtless mouthings, Calvin had looked upon it all as being more or less good fun—as being merely the to-be-expected rantings of an official of Mr. Giles's type. But when Mr. Giles came down to distinct personalities; that was different. Cal turned away and entered the office without a word.

The assistant-superintendent came bouncing in a few minutes after Barnard; he slammed open the stationery cases, peeked in, snorted his disgust; he grabbed the knob of the clothes-locker door and twisted it.

"This is locked!" he snorted, "where's the key?"

He seized the knob with both hands, impatient of delay, and jerked. The flimsy door sprung—and snapped open, almost throwing Mr. Giles off his balance.

Digitized by Google

MR. GILES stared at the grimy, dirty-faced figure disclosed from behind the door; his hands dropped to his sides, his jaw dropped open; he made a queer noise with his mouth, he moistened his lips with the tip of his tongue.

"Richard!" gasped Giles, bewilderedly. "Richard!"

He half raised his hands, then let them fall to his sides again.

The youth within the clothes-locker fixed defiant, sulky eyes upon the assistant-superintendent. For a moment the two confronted each other, speechless. Then the younger man lifted his chin, squared his shoulders, and with a little swaggering air stepped out into the office.

"Well—here I am!" he said.

Mr. Cal, standing up at the front of the office, viewed the little tableau with keenness and dawning comprehension, recalling the ex-robber's previous agitation when he had first beheld Mr. Giles coming. Mr. Giles' exclamation, "Richard," had also helped a lot, and when the younger man issued from his hiding-place and stood close to the assistant-superintendent the solution —or a big part of it—flashed upon Cal as he perceived the resemblance between the two. Here, indeed, were father and son!

"The wandering boy returned!" ejaculated Cal to himself; he was sorry for the wanderer.

"What were you doing in there?" demaded Giles, still amazed and uncomprehending. He gaped helplessly.

"I was hiding," returned Richard, with commendable directness.

He thrust his hands into his ragged-coat pockets.

Giles' face flushed.

"Hiding!" he exclaimed, " of course!"

The arrogance of his manner, which the surprise had momentarily dissipated, crept back. He gazed with displeasure at his son, and at his son's unkempt apparel.

"I am surprised, and shamed, Richard, to see you in this condition," he said sternly. "You were hiding from me?"

"Yes," said Richard shortly.

Giles' eye grew hard.

"And where have you been, sir, since you left home?"

"Four places," answered Richard promptly; he checked them off with his fingers: "East, West, North and South."

"None of your disrespect!" flared Giles, Sr. He leveled a rigid finger at Richard. "You are not going again! You are coming home with me, right now!"

It was patent that this gave Mr. Richard no great pleasure.

"Well," he said resignedly, "I guess I'll have to. I haven't a sou left, I haven't had a bite to eat since yesterday—and you can see for yourself how it is with my clothes."

He cast a rueful eye down over his garments. But suddenly he seemed to recall something.

"But wait," he cried, "maybe not!" Richard look at Cal. "Please, Mr. Agent," he whined whimsically, "may I go home with my father?"

Richard turned to his parent.

"You see," he explained, "I'll have to get his consent, first."

This was altogether astounding and incomprehensible to the father.

"What has he to do with it?" said Giles angrily. "If I say you'll come, that's enough—you'll come!"

"No, no!" dissented Richard reprovingly. "I can't go unless the agent says I may. How about it, Mr. Agent?"

"Do you want to go, Dicky?" asked Cal, choking back his desire for merriment.

"You put me in a hard place with that question," said Dicky diffidently. "You say—go, or don't go."

"What foolishness is this?" cried Giles, Sr., fiercely, unable longer to restrain himself. He glowered at Cal.

"Now don't you go trying to scare him," protested Richard. "I don't believe you can. I tried it myself, a while ago."

Apparently Richard decided that his father had been misled long enough, and that the time had come for explanations. He stooped to the floor and picked up the handkerchief that Cal had torn from his face. With reckless bravado he placed it once more over his face, his eyes at the two holes.

"Look!" said Richard to his parent. "I came in here with this on, and with a gun in my hand, and I tried to hold your agent up and take his cash. But I couldn't feaze him and he got me—mask, gun and all. This was just before you came. When we saw you I asked him to hide me—which he did. Show him the pistol, Mr. Agent."

Cal did as requested, and Dicky dropped the mask from his face.

"That explains it all," calmly finished

Digitized by Google

Richard. "And now, if Mr. Agent wants ample revenge for the gentle remarks that I overheard you shooting at him, here's his chance."

"You—you tried to rob him?" gasped Giles, Sr., dumbfounded. Richard nodeed.

"Yes. So you can now understand why I have to ask him. He still can send me to the calaboose if he wants to, you know."

A proud, unbending man come to grief is a pitiful sight; so Richard's father. Incapable, for a moment, of word or action, he looked miserably from one to the other.

"Richard—" he stumbled finally, "this—I am amazed——"

He turned in his bewilderment to Cal. "Barnard——"

And that was as far as the assistant-superintendent got, for, looking into the steady, dark eyes of Cal Barnard, it suddenly came to Giles that he had no right to expect mercy or consideration at the hands of this man. Remembrance of the vindictiveness with which he had berated Barnard—premeditated vindictiveness—for conditions for which Barnard was in nowise to blame, surged in upon Giles; and it came to him with something like a shock that Barnard understood all this.

The prospective disgrace of his son, and with it the stigma that would be thrown over his own self, was almost too much for the assistant-superintendent. His hands dropped to his sides like dead weights; his chin dropped on his breast; it came to him that the ways of his life had been poor things, the culmination was this: the dislike of his son, and the necessity of asking mercy from a man who had good cause to deny it. An old man, his pride gone, his arrogance gone, facing disgrace through his son and too spiritless to endeavor to ward it off—this was Giles.

Calvin did not miss this swift, subtle change in the assistant-superintendent, and the sudden collapse of the man's egotistical front touched him strangely; he had a mingled feeling of shame and generosity. Giles had called him an ignoramus, also a fool.

Very well; but Giles was an old man, unloved and drawing near to the end of his string of gray days; and Cal was a young man, with the promise of many golden days before him; he could afford to be generous. Besides, Dicky didn't want to go to jail; his cynical air was but a mask to cover his true feelings; a good game boy, Dicky.

"Mr. Giles," said Cal quietly, "you were going to ask me?"

He spoke like one prompting.

"Barnard—yes—" Giles' voice was dull and hopeless. "I was going to ask you to let my boy——"

His voice trailed off into nothingness again.

"I understand," said Cal.

He appeared to consider for a few minutes. Then presently he gazed with solemn eyes at the assistant-superintendent.

"If I were an ordinary, normal man," he said slowly, "I know what I might do."

He hesitated.

"But," he pursued, "being a mere ignoramus, and a fool——"

Giles' chin jerked up from his breast, his face flaming. He was certain, as he now caught the veiled sarcasm in Barnard's eyes and words, that Cal meant to have his revenge. But, certain as he was, he had a sense of shame at his own blundering.

"Barnard!" begged Giles. "Barnard—I didn't—I swear——"

Cal stopped him with uplifted hand.

"Be quiet!" he commanded. "I don't want to hear it." He went on steadily with his sentence. "But, being a mere ignoramus, and a fool, I'll do this."

Cal turned to Giles' son.

"Dicky," he said, "go home with your father!"

THE ADVENTURER

by **WILL H. HENDRICKSON**

He loved the hills and streams where no man wandered,
It was his greatest joy to find, explore;
And death, he said, would be a great adventure
Save that so many men had gone before.

Digitized by Google

PHANFO THE TERRIBLE

by

CHARLES BROWN, Jr.

Author of "Red Flannel," and "The Hurricane"

LINCOLN McCULLOCH could add nothing more to the letter over which his thin blue-veined hand had toiled all through the white heat of morning. Scraping his chair back from the bamboo table that served on one side of the low room for the sundry purposes of a missionary, he rose unsteadily to his short leather boots and let fall from his hundred and forty pounds of bone and flesh the gray trade blanket which he had wrapped about himself to sweat out fever poisoning.

Clothed in soiled white duck, he stayed his lack-luster gray eyes for fully a minute on the dental books and forceps scattered beside the brown skull in the round of the table. His look was held the longest by the two rows of teeth yellowing in the wide-open mouth.

When McCulloch finally stooped his fever-breaking body, he nervously gathered the blanket up and laid it across the foot of the cane bed projecting out of the shadow that darkened half the room. He did not return to the table immediately, but, with the letter, worried his lean frail body to the square of the veranda entrance, then out to the railing.

He grasped it with his tanned fingers until the knuckles turned dull white. The next moment his eyes went anxiously down the red-clay track of the hill and out beyond the white coral strand where the breakers were dashing themselves to death.

The South Pacific was as blue and empty as the hot noonday sky.

Lincoln McCulloch knelt on the wide veranda and shut his eyes on the far-away glistening sea-line. The soft fingers of the water wind reached up from the coral strand and brushed the long gray hair out of his worn leather-tanned face. He began to pray silently, moving his thin lips with rapidity.

The prayer was long and filled with the supplications of a missionary who was sick and in trouble. Once McCulloch cried in a broken voice:

"Oh God, restrain Phanfo's violence and keep him from outrage and bloodshed. Command him to have no power against Thy servant!"

Through most of the prayer he kept his hands clasped on the railing. He may have been kneeling before an altar. There were times, too, when he closed his fingers on his chest and lifted his head until his neck was hidden by hair as gray as the sunshade half drawn above him.

At the close of the prayer he brought his look back across the shimmering white beach of Binu and staggered into the doorway where he leaned with the sea breath on his damp face. Except for the heavy sparkling sea, the grove of pale-green coconut-palms tossing half down the hill, and an unseen cockatoo crying sadly in the thick of the jungle above the house, McCulloch was all alone. The mission boys had gone before daylight that morning to the far side of the dreary hot hills to hunt wild pigeons. They would not be back until darkening.

The missionary's dull eyes sought the white paper fluttering in his hand. The last paragraph, laboriously written near the

Digitized by Google

bottom of the page, was what made them look.

"My death this afternoon is inevitable. Phanfo will take my head immediately following the operation," the paragraph informed the commander of the *Cambrian*, an English man-of-war patroler that was two weeks overdue at Binu on the west coast of Malaita. "My extracting his tooth will not prevent the bush chief from carrying out his design. You know that Mr. Jameison, whose charge I am filling and whose head I have been unable to secure, was murdered while giving Phanfo tobacco.

"I am almost down with fever taken this morning, and in another hour or two Phanfo will be here. And I know nothing about dentistry. The canoes have been carried away from the lagoon, so I can not escape. I had hoped that the *Cambrian* or the *Sherman Barnes* would get in by noon."

McCulloch shifted his back to the narrow reef-spiked straits, where the clouds were drifting, white and wind-massed, toward Suo, and went over to the table. The letter he enveloped and carried down to the coral-powdered beach shimmering in the fierce noonday sun.

At the green tide-marked jetty—where the shore-going boats of the *Sherman Barnes* and other recruiting schooners tied up before signing on boys for labor on the plantations of the Lohano Soap Company—he slipped the long envelope between the hot stones above the reach of the lapping water. A portion of its whiteness he permitted to show so that when the boys rowed in it would be seen immediately.

McCulloch did not return at once to the red-roofed mission cottage propped high on long stilts in the clearing on the side of the hill, but walked slowly the entire half ring of the beach, treading close to where the foam was spreading over the sand like thin white lace.

His eyes, shaded by the deep brim of a white cork helmet, were fixed constantly on the far sea edge sparkling through the narrow straits, and his lips prayed silently for either a sail or a thick smudge of low trailing black. That the *Cambrian* and the *Sherman Barnes* were two weeks overdue he could attribute only to the storms at sea.

With the scorch of the cruel sun on him, he continued to walk the quarter-mile beach. He was in trouble and wanted to think how he was going to get through it. During the thirty years he had preached on the beaches of New Guinea, Fiji and the Solomon Islands it had been his way of solving problems—walking and thinking, walking and thinking.

Twice the tan boots crunched irregularly through the loose coral gravel running up to the bank. His indomitable will doggedly spurred him on, as in far-away Fiji it had made him win more converts than any other missionary who had gone out to those dark equatorial lands.

The glare of the sea nearly blinded him. His eyes blinked in their shriveled sockets and stung with pain that was almost unendurable. He was tired, and sick with fever, and almost wished that he could go back to the lands above the horizon—a thousand miles beyond Malaita and her flesh-craving heathens. He reeled against the bank and fell prone with his face on his arms and one leg over the other like a corpse flung high upon the beach. His breath came in short broken gasps.

Lincoln McCulloch knew that even if the *Cambrian* or the *Sherman Barnes* did fetch Binu by afternoon he would remain. And that if they did not put in he would go as Mr. Jameison had gone—praying for compassion and forgiveness for cannibal Malaita.

For in Sydney he had volunteered nine months before to carry the Gospel to Binu on the edge of Malaita, the black heart of the Solomon Islands, where the *Lotu*, or the Worship, had succeeded in getting a weak foothold. In short, he had accepted for one year the mission left vacant when Phanfo, chief of the bushmen living in the hills above Binu, dragged Mr. Jameison, a *Lotu* carrier, off to the community flesh oven.

Also, he had pledged himself to secure Mr. Jameison's head which the bushmen were holding as a trophy. And if he were alive at the end of a year he would continue the *Lotu*, or the Worship, for another year, so he had already announced to the Colonial Mission Board.

That was now problematical, for he was positive his chances of being alive that very evening amounted to just two. The *Cambrian* or the *Sherman Barnes* might make the island before sundown; and, again, he might hold Phanfo and the bushmen off by persuasion and argumentation until the mission boys returned from pigeon shooting.

Digitized by Google

BUT any South-Sea skipper knowing Phanfo and his man-eaters would have said that the missionary was too optimistic, that he had not even one chance. Especially when Phanfo's teeth were giving him a pain such as he had never before experienced or heard of.

Until the previous night there had not been a pain like it at Binu, so the emissary, one of Phanfo's three prime ministers, had said with great positiveness to McCulloch that morning in delivering a message from the bush chief. Not even the pain Phanfo's first wife—a too loquacious woman—suffered when he sneaked behind her as she was digging taro roots and slashed off her head with his tomahawk could compare with the tooth hurt which had crawled into his mouth while the village was at sleep.

And when her brains were scrambled in her skull and served at his sunset meal she did not feel a whit of pain. Nor could the death spasms of his second wife who had aged too fast, into whose stomach he ran a spear and broke off the point, compare with this new hurt. Nor yet the pain of his third wife whom he beat to death because he believed that she should not die a natural death.

The prime minister had also emphasized that the hundred and sixty-nine salt-water men and women whom Phanfo and the bushman had killed and *kai-kai'd* (eaten) during the off-truce days had never endured such suffering. Nor had Mr. Jameison when Phanfo severed the missionary's spinal column at the base of the brain the moment he opened the mission cupboard to bring Phanfo a gift of tobacco.

A hundred-fold more endurable was the never-to-be-forgotten devil-devil pain which went across the whole of the island one morning not long after Mr. Jameison had been digested. Great Britain was the instigator of this particular pain. Stretching out her long arm, the *Cambrian*, she hurled terrific handfuls of devil-devil fire and shot into the village, plunging Phanfo and all of his subjects into the back bush.

A shore party searched in vain for Mr. Jameison's head, burned the huts, including the grass palace, cut down the few coconut and banana-trees, destroyed the tobacco and taro, and killed ten pigs and sixty fowl. They wanted to stamp for all time upon Phanfo's black mind the inevitability of the white man. Also, that *Lotu*, or Worship, carriers were not to be dragged to the flesh ovens.

There was but one thing to which Phanfo's pain could be likened. It was as terrible as though a curse had been cried on the bush chief by the hundred and seventy sun-dried and smoke-cured heads staring from the long rafters of the grass palace.

Of course, the prime minister did not say that of all those skulls Mr. Jameison's was the most valuable and the only one guarded day and night by Phanfo's four most formidable warriors. And that a jack-pot consisting of ninety fathoms of shell money and twenty-five pigs had been offered for it by Chief Louis of Suo.

Nor how Phanfo warred on the salt-water men, taking fourteen heads, after Chief Freddie of Langa Langa poisoned him with crimson arita berries or "the never-wake-up-berries" while trying to obtain the skull which neither the long arm of Great Britain nor the *Lotu* carrier had succeeded in taking away from Phanfo.

Instead, the emissary had reiterated numerous times that the tooth pain was making a great disturbance in the mouth of his chief who was coming for relief that afternoon. Phanfo would have gone to the mission house at sunup, but he did not have the six fathoms of yellow trade calico with which to cover his regal nakedness.

Not once, while delivering the message, had the prime minister inquired if Lincoln McCulloch possessed a potency which would put an end to the tooth hurt. He presumed that a *Lotu* carrier who had come to Malaita in a giant canoe that drove with unseen paddles and threw all morning devil-devil fire and shot into the village was capable of accomplishing any number of wonderworks, with the exception of recovering Mr. Jameison's skull.

Had he inquired, McCulloch would not have told him that in all his thirty years of *Lotu* carrying he had never pulled a tooth. For that would have brought Phanfo and the bushmen down upon the mission in anger.

Several minutes after falling on the beach, McCulloch staggered to his feet and toiled his white streak of a body slowly up the path to the seaward-looking house.

There was little heat in the mission room when McCulloch entered, as the decline of the noon sun had almost cooled the place. McCulloch drew the bamboo table, with its

Digitized by Google

skull and dental implements and books, into the window fronting the steep green growth of the jungle. The next minute he knelt over a medicine-chest opposite the table and raised its lid.

The chest was a ready-made and fool-proof affair, like those carried by traders and skippers, and had been brought out from Sydney by Mr. Jameison. In the top tray were two blue rows of round-shouldered bottles. Each bottle had been carefully labeled and numbered.

"No. 1, cuts and sores."

McCulloch blinked his small gray eyes at the labels, bending now and then to remove a bottle and wipe off its yellow dust coat.

"No. 2, Dysentry. No. 3, Rheumatism, No. 4, Yellow fever. No. 5, Toothache."

From bottle No. 12 McCulloch emptied twenty grams of quinine into the cup of his palm and swallowed the dose with a quick backward toss of his head. A surprising effect was produced by the medicine. Within a few minutes McCulloch gained complete control of himself. And in the two hours following he found it possible to run over the more important parts of the two books as well as making an experiment with the skull.

Had McCulloch been reviewing the volumes for the literary department of a newspaper he would have said that they consisted of a variety of teeth plates poorly executed and printed and particularly hard on the eyes. The books were stiff and water-stained, while many pages were missing. The shore boys had accidentally dropped the volumes, with the medicine-chest, overboard while skimming their long canoe to the jetty.

Many times during the two hours Lincoln McCulloch caught his eyes straying unwillingly about the room. They carried far into the retina the long cane bed, screened with white mosquito-netting, extending toward the veranda entrance; the tomahawk gashes deep in the cupboard door where Phanfo had attacked Mr. Jameison; and the yellow grass mat covering the homicide-tale red-written at the foot of the cupboard.

There were periods, too, when McCulloch, with book in hand, strode nervously to the door and lifted his eyes to the gloomy green of the jungle. Each time he saw nothing that would check the anxiety eating through to the bone—not even a gray smoke-mist thread curling above the lonely hilltop trees. He could not understand why Phanfo had not come.

AT THE end of an hour and a half, McCulloch, positive of his theory, made the skull experiment.

He examined minutely in the window light the yellowing teeth. The head had been given to him by Phanfo who "repented" one morning for murdering and *kai-kai'ng* Mr. Jameison. After Phanfo had been welcomed into the *Lotu* and sent home to the bush with fifteen minutes of open-eyed prayer—McCulloch never prayed with closed eyes in the presence of a bush chief who had a hobby for collecting heads and an insatiable appetite for white-man flesh—ten sticks of tobacco and four fathoms of calico, a mission boy got back nerve enough to identify the skull.

It was not Mr. Jameison's, but that of a salt-water man whom the boy's father had killed six months before in the lower bush while running down wild pigs.

On comparing the teeth with those in the book plates, McCulloch extracted them. The operation, clumsy and laborious, did not make him sure of himself—positive that he could meet any emergency, especially Phanfo's. Nor did it abate a whit his fear that the bush chief would not endure the extracting pain.

Again Lincoln McCulloch fidgeted in the doorway. Far up in the dismal green of the jungle the cockatoo was still crying in its thin sad voice. Now and then came the faint-off bark of a native dog or the shout of a boy running home from the deep shade of the bush. In the coco-grove below the house the afternoon wind was beginning to hum, and across the whole of the island the white heat was going out of the day.

McCulloch wished that Phanfo would hurry, for the fever-poisoning was once more downing his body.

Turning away, he saw through the veranda entrance the blue and white surf of the strong setting current. It urged him to the veranda where he caught the push of the wind. As yet, there was not a sign of sail or smoke smudge, nothing but gulls reeling and drifting, like white foam flakes, above a desolate sea.

McCulloch fretted himself into the canvas hammock sagging in the corner beyond the door. His thin eyelids closed, soothing the dull fever pain, and he lay quietly,

Digitized by Google

with his lean hands folded, as though he were already in his grave beneath the powdered coral shore and the burrowing land-crabs of savage Binu.

The sea broke into a long moan which filled the deep hollows of the hills. To McCulloch it sounded just like a pipe-organ playing a requiem for the sailors, traders, missionaries, and beach-combers who had perished on the far-out sand fringes of the South Pacific.

Suddenly McCulloch jerked himself half up, then paused with his turned head listening and one leg thrown out of the hammock. It was not the organing of the sea that aroused him, but a drum—a *lali* or death-drum beating high on the side of the jungle. McCulloch stumbled hastily into the house.

From the door stairs he saw plunging through the jungle rift an immense yellow bulk. Directly behind it swept a long brown column, flashing rifles and spears against the sunning trees. Twice the yellow splotch halted and sent across the island a pain wail that hushed the monotonous crying of the gulls. The wail was accompanied each time by the terrible *lali* throb and the harsh bursting cries of the column. The cries and the throb almost toppled the courage wall against which McCulloch was bracing himself.

His eyes followed with suspense into a clump of banana trees the descent of the yellow and brown formation, while the wail voices and the drum rolled violently toward him. Suspense heightened at the end of four minutes.

When McCulloch lifted his face to the twilight-green mouth of the tree tunnel seventy-five feet above the house, he saw clamoring toward him a kinky-haired old native whose tall preponderous body was wrapped with fathoms of yellow calico. With him were six tall thin-limbed bushmen, one of whom was beating the drum with a pair of short thigh-bones.

A moment later McCulloch observed a hundred or more naked savages surge out of the leafy entrance, flourishing Snider rifles, bows, arrows, and long-handled spears. Before them leaped eight lean black-and-white native dogs that had come down to snap at him.

McCulloch scarcely breathed as the enormous yellow-calicoed leader, clutching a reddish tomahawk, checked his wild rush and glared ferociously down on him. The native raised a huge brown paw to the left of his face, swollen twice as large as an ivory nut, and mouthed a horrible groan. He was immediately answered by the clustering bushmen.

True to Malaitain custom, they were keeping the death chant—all except the four warriors guarding Mr. Jameison's skull. For under no circumstances would Phanfo leave such a valuable head without guard, especially after the *Lotu* carrier and the long arm of Great Britain had searched for it.

At first McCulloch wanted to run in and bar the door, but second thought prompted him not to. He eyed Phanfo silently, taking in every detail.

Among the things he noted was that, despite fifty-odd years, the bush chief was about two hundred and thirty pounds heavy. Also, that he seemed nearly again as tall as he, and browner than the slanting stems of the coconut-trees nodding above him. His wooly pear-shaped head, crowned with the golden rim of a straw hat, stamped upon McCulloch an all-time impression of the barbarism for which and by which the bushman lived.

Phanfo's large curving ear-disks were slitted. Through the twelve slits were fastened safety-pins and empty cartridge-shells. In the right ear was a pink teacup handle. His broad nostrils were also perforated. The nose was thrust with bone and wooden bodkins as long and thick as pen-holders, and from the punctured meaty point projected three spikes of trade beads strung on stiff wire.

About his heavy-muscled neck hung a long rusty bicycle chain at the end of which was suspended the brassy skeleton of a clock and an unbroken soup-tureen cover. The cover was highly valued by Phanfo who had carried it away from a schooner after chopping the skipper and his wife to pieces with the ship's ax. His arms, stout as McCulloch's thighs, were circled to the elbows with shell armlets.

McCulloch risked his gaze from Phanfo to the long-limbed flesh-eaters who were grimacing hungrily at him. He observed that they, too, were ornamented, each ear being slitted with three to eight holes. Wooden plugs, two inches in diameter, had been inserted into some of the holes, while others contained clay pipes and black shoestring bows. In many instances there were not enough ear ornaments.

Digitized by Google

SUDDENLY McCulloch's heart began to pound like the surf. For directly below him stood Phanfo, rolling the whites of his eyes and tightening his tomahawk grip. Phanfo looked up at at him and snarled in a gruff bass——

"Hey, you big fella marsta, go look'm eye belong you along mouth an' bring'm me fella one big fella tooth who belong me walk about too much."

This McCulloch translated into—"Say, you look into my mouth and pull out the tooth which is hurting so."

"You big fella, make'm walk into one fella house," he directed with great difficulty as though his lips were wedged tight between his teeth. He pointed at the insidious natives. "Fellas him no make'm walk into one fella house."

Self-preservation was uppermost in McCulloch's mind as he admitted Phanfo and nervously fastened the door, shutting the natives out. Fear impelled him to take every precaution not to turn his back on the chief. In transferring the table and the cane chair to the veranda door where the light was strongest, he walked Phanfo before him. For he recalled numerous heads that would not have been stuck upon the rafters of Phanfo's grass palace had the victims not turned their backs. He was thinking particularly of Mr. Jameison.

As he seated the yellow bulk, he noticed that the high-grass homicide was anything but calm, that his huge thighs were trembling as violently as a coconut-tree registering the approach of a hurricane.

McCulloch lowered his dark-ringed eyes apprehensively to the stained tomahawk lying near Phanfo's flat toes and asked for it. He was informed with a darkening of Phanfo's brow that the blade was not to be removed until such time as Phanfo should decide to take his destiny back into his own hands. McCulloch acquiesced as he also did a minute afterward when the bush chief refused to remove the soup-tureen cover and the hat-rim because of ethical reasons.

Withdrawing to the table four paces behind the chair, he laid the forceps in order. Their six metallic teeth he pointed away from Phanfo who was roving his storm-black eyes fearfully over the contents of the table.

As McCulloch was removing bottle No. 5, —Toothache—from the medicine-tray, he saw Phanfo telescope his fat waist, seize his malignant face between his palms, and distort his body in a paroxysm of pain. McCulloch dripped perspiration and his face whitened a shade close to that of the soup-tureen cover tinkling against the brassy clock frame on the long writhe of Phanfo's stomach.

By the two minutes the pain cries had exhausted themselves on the sailless sea, McCulloch had backed into the dark of the corner beyond the cupboard, and the savages had stormed the door in response to their chief's distress. Ten of the bushmen, clamoring through the bed-netting, menaced the missionary with evil gleaming Snider rifles and poison-to-death spears, while four others seized the forceps for ornaments. Behind them McCulloch glimpsed sugar-brown faces and shoulders surging into the house.

His door look was cut off the next moment when Phanfo hurricaned across the springy floor, knocking six subjects off their legs, and wrathfully snatched the forceps that the four bushmen were trying to insert in their ear lobes.

McCulloch felt several grams of relief as Phanfo struck one of them with the flat of his rock-hard palm and scattered the others like bugs on a board. But he did not see, the very next minute, the five men and a boy who crept up the stairs and squatted their lean brown hams just outside the door.

"Me no cross along big fella marsta," he was assured as the bush chief reseated himself. "Me no cross until you big fella marsta make'm one fella mouth who belong me hurt too much."

McCulloch did not reply immediately, but rolled his sleeves above his slim elbows. His throat was as dry as that of the cockatoo which had at last stopped its all-day crying in the bush; his hair hung heavily against his forehead, wet and foam-gray; and his limbs were as unsteady as the green tree plumes struggling in the wind lips below the house.

The sun began to slant into late afternoon, staring through the veranda entrance with a morbid curiosity to watch Phanfo take the *Lotu* carrier's head.

Presently McCulloch instructed Phanfo to open his mouth, demonstrating several times how to accomplish it. Near the end of the lower left jaw he found the thing of

Digitized by Google

hurt. The tooth was decaying, one wall having partly crumbled, and the gums were inflamed and swollen.

He was now positive that Phanfo could not endure the extracting pain, that not even the oil of cloves which he began to rub around the tooth would mitigate the hurt. He decided to get the affair over with as quickly as his trembling hand and Phanfo would permit, notwithstanding the consequences, as there was little likelihood that the *Cambrian* or the *Sherman Barnes* would fetch Binu that afternoon.

From the chest he secured a long thin knife and, before Phanfo knew just what was going to happen, lanced the gums. The books had not given him any pointers on lancing gums, but that did not prevent him from trying. At the knife cut Phanfo clutched McCulloch's arms, let a blood yell and jerked loose the blade. It flew across to the door where the squatting bushmen pounced upon it.

McCulloch expected the bush chief to take his destiny back into his hands at once. Instead Phanfo moaned for him to proceed, as though he would submit to any amount of pain in order to again eat at the first opportunity the flesh of a white man.

It was then that McCulloch crashed headlong into a predicament. He could not go on. Everything he had studied about that particular tooth had skipped into the background of remembrance. And it was impossible for him to rout it.

"Has it one prong? Two prongs? Three prongs?" he inquired anxiously of the plates in the second volume as Phanfo leaned his waist and sprayed the white palmwood floor with mouthfuls of red foam.

McCulloch despaired when he saw that the plates could not tell him how many prongs there were. They explained to him the order in which the teeth were set in the jaw, but nothing beyond that.

He finally thought of a method for determining the number of tooth roots. He compared Phanfo's tooth with the teeth he had extracted from the skull and found a three-pronged one that corresponded to it. This was not encouraging as he would have to take hold of the tooth deep down in the gums.

The next instant he was purturbed by another question to which he could not find an answer as he excitedly thumbed the book pages.

"Which pair of forceps are used on three prongs?" it asked insistently.

He tried the six instruments on the table, fitting them to the skull tooth, and selected a pair resembling miniature grappling-irons. Again he oil-of-cloved Phanfo's tooth and gums, then warily fitted the forceps around the tooth. A moment later he started to pull and twist forcibly.

As Phanfo closed his mouth on the forceps like a Langa Langa shark biting through a salt-water boy and heaved off the chair, McCulloch's hold slipped. The forceps banged along the upper row of teeth and crashed out, separating the soup tureen cover from the bicycle chain. McCulloch leaped back to the wall.

When he glanced at Phanfo, a curly-headed boy, who had bolted from the doorway, was on his fours between the wall and the bush chief, snatching up pieces of soup-tureen cover. Phanfo arm-dragged the boy to the stairs and plunged him angrily to the ground.

INSTANTLY McCulloch's ears were filled with the shrieks of the fear-stricken bushmen fleeing into the trees as though one of them was about to be knocked in the head for Phanfo's supper. Also, he heard Phanfo roaring in a voice as loud as the wind on hurricane days for them to come back.

Now that he had broken the precious soup-tureen cover and Phanfo was deserted for the first time by his subjects, McCulloch made ready to go the way of Mr. Jameison. He riveted his perspiring face straight ahead and prayed silently, waiting to rush in and ward off, if possible, the tomahawk blows that were about to descend. It seemed to him as though Fate had decreed that his head should be stuck upon the rafters with the skull that he had pledged himself to retrieve.

But there was no inrush. For in the following minute McCulloch was instructed by Phanfo, who had reseated himself with fury, to hurry and take another grip on the tooth which was now loose.

Not until immediately after the fourth grip failure did McCulloch feel the tooth vacating the jaw bone. As he tightened the bite of the forceps, his arm was grasped by Phanfo who rolled his stomach and kicked the white palmwood floor until the strike of his feet sounded like rain falling on

Digitized by Google

banana leaves. McCulloch did not decrease his extracting pressure a whit, but twisted and pulled with finality as Phanfo fought violently at the short end of the forceps.

A minute later McCulloch dropped into Phanfo's yellow lap a tooth with a long three-pronged stain. Then he leaped around the curve of the table, letting the forceps fall to the floor, and concentrated his gray eyes on the bush chief.

For three minutes or more he watched Phanfo alternate from blood spraying to turning the tooth minutely over in the wide spread of his palm as he cast eyes for the first time in his fifty-odd years upon the prongs of one of his teeth.

At times McCulloch followed the intent seaward look of Phanfo. He noted that the bush chief was thinking very hard. And that Phanfo's thumb and forefinger were caressing the tooth. It gradually dawned on McCulloch that Phanfo was fascinated by the hurt thing.

Suddenly McCulloch recoiled to the window. Through the soft filtering light he saw Phanfo grasp the tomahawk blade and the forceps, push the chair and the table aside, and lurch toward him, groaning again with the tooth gap pain. McCulloch prepared for the worst.

"Me no *kai-kai* big fella marsta yet."

McCulloch caught all that Phanfo said. He saw him curl a lock of his kinky hair about the forceps and hang the handles directly in front of his left ear as a memorial to the tooth extracting.

"You big fella marsta make'm me one fella sing out (cry loudly). Bime-by at dark me com' for one big fella marsta."

McCulloch made no response, but stepped into the doorway as Phanfo plunged out of the house into the leafy tree tunnel with an ill-omened half chuckle.

When the sound of Phanfo's steps had passed away, McCulloch staggered across to the medicine-chest and poured out the last twenty grams of quinine. Taking the whole of it, he stretched himself on the bed, where the rays of the declining sun still lingered, and lay in doubt as to why the bush chief had delayed killing him until darkening.

"What is his motive?" he asked anxiously. "Why did he put it off?"

He found but one answer.

"Probably Phanfo is waiting for his pain to subside so that he can get real bushman pleasure in taking my head."

McCulloch knew that bushmen did all sorts of things to the people they were about to kill. He recalled unpleasantly the killing of a New Guinea trader whom he had once confessed. His mind brought back the facts as vividly as they had been given to him by the captain of *The Coral Ship*, a black-birding schooner.

The captain had escaped in a canoe at night from a cannibal village four days after he and his crew were attacked and carried off to the canoe house. McCulloch remembered that the cannibals worried the trader for three days at the end of which time they killed him because he was getting sick.

"That is what Phanfo intends to do!" McCulloch got up from the bed hastily. "He wants to worry me for a few hours."

His brain began to pound with the thought of escape, a thought which he had shut out all day because he was certain that there was no way of escaping Phanfo.

"Maybe I can make it."

He stumbled out to the veranda and hurried his eyes down to the drowsy murmuring sea.

"Perhaps I can hide in the bush."

The next moment he expelled the escape thought as he knew that Phanfo and the bushmen would drag the bush for him.

When he brought his gaze back, he noted half-way up the hill the green feathers of the palm-trees hanging like tassels on a casket. Swiftly he shifted his face to the low sun.

The sun dropped—dropped until the sea ran with molten gold. McCulloch watched the sky turn pink and blue like the inside of the shells he had picked up on the beach at night. Then he saw it gradually dim and darken along the far sea edge. He could not remember having seen such a sunset before, and he wished that Phanfo would let him stay on to watch from the veranda every evening.

As the violet twilight came swiftly down with the jungle wind, he heard the palm-trees below the house whispering noisily:

"Phanfo is returning at dark, for Lincoln McCulloch is a failure! Phanfo is returning at dark, for Lincoln McCulloch is a failure!"

Withdrawing into the house to escape the tree whisperings, he tried to prepare his day-end meal.

"I am a failure," he acknowledged, leaving the half-prepared food and hunching himself on the bed.

Digitized by Google

He turned his eyes to the dark blackness beyond the cupboard.

"I have not accomplished anything at Binu, for Phanfo continues to take heads. And I have not secured Jameison's skull. I am weak like the salt-water men—can't hold my own against Phanfo. Some one stronger than I should have been sent out, some one who could prevent Phanfo from coming tonight."

He wondered why the mission boys had not returned. He was certain that they could hold Phanfo and the bushmen off until morning when the *Cambrian* or the *Sherman Barnes* might put in.

"Perhaps the boys are being held until Phanfo has taken my head," he told himself.

At the end of an hour he lighted the hurricane lantern hanging beside the cupboard. For the stars were out, reminding him of the home lights in Sydney harbor as he had last seen them from the sea.

AS HE was lowering the chimney, a fearful man-voice wail poured out of the bush, drowning the night calls. He felt his body beat with the wild *lali* which rose immediately after the wail, announcing that Phanfo was on the way down.

McCulloch tried to think why Phanfo and the bushmen were death-chanting a missionary whose head was to compensate the chief for all the tooth pain he had suffered. It was the first time in all McCulloch's thirty years of *Lotu* carrying that he had known head-hunters to do that.

Stepping quickly to the verandaward curve of the table, he endeavored to steel himself against the blood-cry breaking a short way above the house.

The next minute he caught a new sound—a weird shrieking which informed him that something unusual was amiss with the bushmen. He started for the hurricane lantern so as to step into the cool moonless night and flash the yellow-light rays inquiringly across the long shadows of the jungleward-slanting coconut-trees. Fear drove him back to the table.

When Phanfo clamored into the room, McCulloch darted his eyes at him and noted that his fat yellow stomach and massive limbs were violently shaking with laughter. Also, McCulloch observed that the bicycle chain had been replaced with a cord of coconut sennit. He could not imagine why Phanfo was wearing the latter.

Dropping his nervous eyes, he at once became alarmed because of the large brainingstone clutched in Phanfo's right paw. McCulloch panic-strode backward, then halted as Phanfo chuckled at him:

"Hey, you big fella marsta, me bring'm flenty fellas belong me who make'm runaway when you big fella marsta make'm me throw'm out one fella boy who belong me. You big fella marsta, go bring'm me one big fella tooth who belong fellas. One fella, one fella tooth. Me make'm fellas no more make'm runaway again."

Then McCulloch, swaying against the table, looked across the room and saw the inevitable. He watched thirty-five recalcitrant man-eaters, spear-goaded by Phanfo's four most formidable warriors, tumble and shriek their thin naked bodies into the house.

"You fellas who belong me make'm runaway no more again," he heard Phanfo roar hilariously the following minute.

He fastened his eyes on Phanfo who began to dance up and down the three-man deep line which the bushmen had formed, stopping now and then to roll his stomach in laughter at the savages who were knuckling their wet eyes with their brown fingers and shaking like spear-grass in the sundown wind.

"Big fella marsta make'm you fellas sing out flenty. No more you fellas make'm runaway."

McCulloch set the hurricane lantern on the table and prepared for all that lay ahead of him. As he lifted his blanched face, he saw one of the redoubtable warriors, a tall heavy-boned savage with a head resembling a worn-out mop, pass Phanfo a package wrapped in yellow banana leaves.

McCulloch startled at the yellow ball and made as if to go over and look at it more closely. He hesitated as Phanfo ceased laughing and carefully deposited the package on the top shelf of the cupboard. McCulloch had never seen it before and he grew afraid, positive that it contained some new killing weapon.

Presently he called for the first patient. As the bushmen hung back, crying with panic, he stared helplessly at Phanfo who had squatted his bulk on the medicine-chest in order to remove the sennit cord. Phanfo hurled across to a first-line native, one of the four who had seized the forceps that afternoon for ornamental purposes, and struck

Digitized by Google

him on the top of the head with the braining-stone. Then he dragged the struggling flesh-eater to the chair as though he were a wild pig that had been run down in the lower bush.

McCulloch began work. He wanted to stop the next moment when Phanfo announced that he was going to assist.

He watched Phanfo set the medicine-chest beside the table and pour a liberal portion of No. 1, Cuts and Sores, into the bushman's mouth. As the savage choked and squirmed, turning almost as yellow as the mysterious package in the cupboard, McCulloch was knocked off his feet by Phanfo who reeled against him, laughing in a voice that hushed the dark wind.

McCulloch worked steadily through the two frightful hours which followed, with Phanfo holding each subject in the chair by means of the braining-stone. At moments McCulloch dispatched his look to the door where the four warriors were preventing the natives from running back to the bush. Extracting from all parts of the jaws, he was dismayed again and again by Phanfo's extravagant use of drugs.

He saw Phanfo empty all of No. 1, Cuts and Sores, on the gums of the first three bushmen. On the eight following head-hunters he observed Phanfo try No. 4, Yellow Fever, and for the ten after that a mixture of No. 5, Toothache, and No. 3, Rheumatism. When this medicine ran out, Phanfo gave No. 6, Burns, until the bottle was empty. Then McCulloch watched him dose the remaining natives with No. 8, Biliousness.

As soon as McCulloch had extracted the last tooth and the bushman had howled away into the jungle, he heard Phanfo addressing him across the table:

"Hey, you big fella marsta, you fix'm me one fella tooth. Me fella keep'm one fella tooth all time."

McCulloch perforated the thirty-five teeth with an awl, working uneasily in the yellow lantern rays as Phanfo snickered to one side of the table. He looked up with a start when Phanfo handed him the cord of coconut sennit and commanded:

"Now, you big fella marsta, you string'm one fella tooth."

When McCulloch finished stringing the teeth, he stepped apprehensively into the blue-black square of the veranda entrance and stood with the sea wind on his back. He watched Phanfo hang the red-and-white tooth necklace about his brown-muscled neck with ecstasy and pride, then saw him transfer the yellow package from the cupboard to the table.

Breathlessly McCulloch looked. He told himself that the ultimate was at hand—just as it had come to Mr. Jameison. Phanfo was going to do away with him through some new death thing, he was certain.

"Hey, you big fella marsta, go look'm eye belong you along leaves."

McCulloch listened fearfully to Phanfo who was grinning all over.

"You big fella marsta, keep'm all time now. Me fright along you too much."

Lincoln McCulloch did not leave the doorway at once, but waited until Phanfo had laughed down the stairs and into the jungle with his warriors. Then he slowly crossed to the table and contemplated the package. He was afraid to undo it.

Suddenly he heard the sea booming over his shoulder:

"Open it. Open it. Open it."

He refused for several minutes. Finally he cut the coconut sennit cord which held the leaves and cautiously removed the wrapping. As he unwrapped the last leaf, he uttered a sharp cry. His hands almost dropped the contents of the package.

"Yes, it is—it is—" he cried, stooping in the flickering yellow light of the hurricane lantern to make sure of the sun-dried and smoke-cured head that he was fumbling in his tired fingers—"it is Jameison's!"

Digitized by Google

The Gift of Experience

by George L. Catton

Author of "Old Dad," "In Front of the Other," etc.

THE cache was gone!

Peter Falkner sank down on a rotten log and dropped his little bundle in the snow at his feet. He was finished and he knew it. Up the river barely sixty miles was Kelly's, but . . . Peter raised his head. Above him among the short branches of the forty-foot pine the straps of his cache-pack whipped empty in the wind. The cache was gone!

Peter's characteristic smile faded from his haggard face, and returned as a grim, grinning leer. What did it matter that those long slashes and deep pits in the bark of the pine gave evidence that the thief had been a bear? What did it matter now that in his hurry he had forgotten Old Dad's warning—forgotten to peel the bark from the pine to keep the bears from climbing it? Regrets, self-censure were useless now. Now nothing mattered. To Kelly's was only sixty miles, but . . . .

Peter had traveled three days on a handful of beans. For three days with practically nothing with which to answer the cruelly insistent call of his stomach, Peter had plugged through the heavy snow. And never had the smile left his face. Always when he had looked back he saw the squared stump of a silver birch, proclaiming in deeply carved letters to the wilderness that the five-hundred feet of a future fortune immediately behind it was claimed by Peter Falkner; and always when he had looked ahead he saw two full weeks' grub cached in a forty-foot pine. There had been no reason to frown. But now!

Peter harbored no hope of help ahead. The river had been rigidly rippleless for over a week and he was away off the beaten trails. Yet he picked up his little bundle and labored to his feet. Though worn and exhausted with the past three days of almost restless traveling without food; though every tortured muscle resented cringingly the lash of his will, he turned to the right and kept on up the river. Though he knew that every painful step was taken in vain, still—he had promised Old Dad.

"Ye'll give me yere word, lad, that ye'll no quit when ye're cornered?" Old Dad had demanded with his whimsical persistency; "that ye'll die on yere feet should the worst coom tae the worst?"

And Peter kept his promise.

Peter was barely fifty miles from Kelly's—an hour on a train—when his feet quit dragging. For seven hours Peter plugged ahead. For seven endless hours he pounded through the clinging heavy snow, fighting the grueling ache of his weakness and the turmoil of temptation to drop down and sleep. For seven merciless hours he flogged his weary muscles to a semblance of action. Then his vagrant feet tripped on a dragging stride, and with a sigh that was half a moan he pitched on his face in the snow.

Peter had made seventy miles on a handful of beans. To Kelly's was fifty miles. If he had just—just another handful of beans?

But Peter was not quite finished. Ten minutes of rest and he propped himself to a sitting position. Though his muscles had failed for—for "a handful of beans," his mind was clear and capable of remembering. He had promised Old Dad not to quit.

Digitized by Google

and he had stayed on his feet as long as his strength to do so lasted. But he had also made another promise to Old Dad, a promise that he was going to keep also.

Peter opened his little bundle and spread it out on the snow. Old Dad had given him a Bible and . . . In swift review Peter's thoughts went back to Old Dad.

Old Dad Falkner had spent five years in Alaska.

A strong, healthy middle-aged man Old Dad had left home to participate in the first Klondike gold-rush, and for five years there had come no word from him. Then one day, a physical and partly mental wreck, he had crawled back, to sit all day in his big armchair by the window and read his Bible.

Nor could he be persuaded to recount his experience. Though the general tenor of his meandering talk more than hinted at much terrible suffering, he seemed unwilling, or unable to particularize.

"'Tis a hard an' ungodly country," he would reiterate whimsically. "Five years I had of it, an' never once was I inside of a kirk. Sunday—I didna' ken; 'twas a' the same as a week-day. An' a curse was in the mouth of every man. I've watched men die cursing, instead of praying—a' weel!"

And that was all he would say. Till his grandson announced to his family his intention of "trying out his luck" in the new rush, Old Dad kept to generalities. Then finding that Peter had made up his mind, and that his persistent pleading was unavailing, Old Dad began to give Peter scraps of advice and to demand promises. And when Peter came into his room the morning he went away, Old Dad's wrinkled face was drawn and stern.

"I've no much of the world's goods, lad," he quavered grimly, "but I've gie ye some bits of advice, an' here's my old Bible."

"But, Dad," Peter interrupted protestingly.

The old man held up a trembling hand for silence.

"I've anither one, lad," he announced assuringly. "An', lad, I'm no askin' ye to read it steady. A' I'm askin' ye is tae promise me that should ye coom tae the end of yere trail, ye'll——"

The old man stopped and his eyes gleamed momentarily. Then:

"Promise me, lad," he demanded grimly. "Give me yere word as a man, Peter, that ye'll pack it wi' ye tae the end of yere trail; an' that should the worst coom tae the worst—should ye fall faintin' by the wayside, ye'll open it an' read it?"

And Peter had promised.

And Peter had kept his word. For two years, over every one of the hundreds of miles he had traveled, Peter had packed Old Dad's gift. But—well, this was the first time he had ever "come to the end of his trail."

Peter opened his little bundle and took out the Bible. With numb fingers that toiled slowly he removed the broad elastic band and the black oilskin wrapper. And on the white paper wrapper beneath, Old Dad had written a message. In his grandfather's coarse scrawl Peter read:

"'Tis the last minute that man waits to make his peace wi' his Maker, Peter, an' then 'tis often too late. An' ye'll be human, too, lad. 'Twill be when yere face is turned tae the long dark trail that ye'll be readin' this. An' I ken well what ye'll hae tae put up wi' in that harrrd an' ungodly country. So, lad, that ye'll no be too late in askin' forgiveness, should ye be facin' the slow death of starvation that I ken so well mysel', I've lied tae ye. To gie ye three or four more days of grace, lad, 'tis no a Bible inside. 'Tis a box of the best condensed chocolate.

"An' then, Peter, for fear that it may be somethin' else that is takin' ye, I've condensed the Bible for ye. 'Ask an' it shall be given unto ye,'—that's all ye need tae know."

Digitized by Google

Hog-tying the Golden Bow

by DOUGLAS S. WATSON

Author of "The Unmudding of the Empire," "The Leak in the Big Dipper," etc.

BURRELL CRANSTON, the twenty-two-year-old superintendent of the Big Dipper, drew in the team before the mine office and shouted. A cloud of October dust, which had clung about the horses on the sixteen-mile drive from Arkansas Hill, drifted slowly up the creek bed, leaving the animals and man covered with its ocher powder. Cranston's journey had been a hurried one; "Better come to the mine at once," was the wording of the laconic telegram from "Brick" Rountree which had found him at the university in Berkeley, where he was completing his last year.

By special permission of the college authorities Cranston did his studying at the mine, making monthly trips from the mountains to take the examinations, and during these absences the Big Dipper was left in Rountree's charge.

"Hi, Brick! Hey! Geiger!" Cranston bellowed impatiently.

Rountree's red head appeared in the doorway. A moment later he was wringing Cranston's hand.

"What's the trouble, Brick?" Cranston watched the smile of greeting fade from Rountree's eager face, and feared the worst.

"Trouble?" The red head wagged ominously. "Burr, the Big Dipper's a goner! We've taken out the last pound of rock! You noticed, didn't you, that the crusher's shut down?"

Cranston's gray eyes wandered up-stream. There was no cloud of dust rising from the crusher-house. There was no roar, no rumble of machinery. The scattered red buildings of the Big Dipper mine seemed to sleep on the sunny hillside above the rushing waters of Skunk Creek.

"Get somebody to take the horses and let's get to the bottom of the puzzle," Cranston determined, springing to the ground, while Rountree called a man to take the hired team to the barn.

"Now what's the straight of it, Brick?"

Geiger, the bookkeeper, Rountree and Cranston leaned over the drafting table in the mine office. The morning sun cast a dazzling glare upon the white sheet before them where lines, red and black, denoted the boundaries of the Big Dipper property and the underground channel, the ancient river bed, from which had come the gold that had built up the senior Cranston's considerable fortune.

Rountree's stubby forefinger moved along the western limit of the Big Dipper. At a point a thousand feet from the northerly line—the line separating the Cranston mine from the Golden Bow—the two nearly parallel red tracks, which wormed and twisted across the paper, stopped.

"Right here the channel swings out of our ground, Burr. See the sharp bend it takes?"

Cranston nodded.

"Heads into Pat Kelly's half-section, doesn't it?"

Kelly, an old-time miner, had settled upon the crest of the ridge between Skunk

Digitized by Google

Creek and the South Fork of the Middle River many years before. There he lived a hermit-like existence, raising a few pigs and cultivating a bit of land about his rough-board shanty. Kelly was sixty-odd years old; a man of few words, irascible, yet there was a kindly light in his small blue eyes for the very few with whom he condescended to have intercourse.

A picture of the old man rose before the superintendent's eyes as Rountree explained. He saw the Irishman sitting in the doorway of his simple home, smoking his pipe, and his interested listener was none other than Cranston himself.

"Brick, there's just one thing to do," he said.

"Yes?"

Both Geiger and Rountree bent forward expectantly.

"We've got to call on Pat and talk turkey."

"Buy Pat Kelly's land!" scouted Geiger. "You could sooner buy Uncle Sam's capitol in Washington!"

"No harm trying, is there?" Cranston laughed feebly.

"You'll have to go alone. I won't go with you. I don't want that crazy Irishman on my trail!" decided Rountree forcibly.

"What, Brick Rountree afraid of Pat Kelly!"

"I am not!" was the snapped protest. "But I'm taking no chances and, what's more, I don't want to spill the beans for you. Kelly might talk business with you, Burr, but I doubt it. He doesn't like me. Remember the pig episode last Christmas?"

Rountree and several others at the mine had lifted a fat porker for the Yuletide feast, neglecting to get Kelly's sanction, or to settle at so much a pound. A pig there must be, and since Kelly would not sell, the shoat was taken by stealth.

"My red head stirs him up like a red rag does a bull. No, you've got to go it alone, Burr!"

THE midday meal over, Cranston climbed slowly up the ridge trail leading to Kelly's domain. Upon the impression he might make would depend the future of the Big Dipper. A rebuff from the owner of the farm, and all operations in the mine must cease. Kelly held the key to a treasure-house to which the Big Dipper tunnel was but the entrance.

The unfortunate pig-lifting was in Cranston's mind like *Banquo's* ghost, it would not down. Try as he would to plan the assault, the porcine spirit rose to plague him. If ever pig was worth its weight in gold that Christmas shoat was; now, its value was apparent, and the question was how to approach the subject of purchase when Kelly's ire had been so deeply stirred.

Through the bull-pines Cranston caught a glimpse of the settler's cabin, and he paused again to form his thoughts. The crusher had been started immediately after dinner. The men had been sent back to work. It would not do to have rumor spread the news that the Big Dipper was a thing of yesterday. Much better to bluff it through; Rountree had been too cautious, too easily frightened. If one would win, it must be by attack, not retreat. A droning of mine machinery floated up the hill, and it was to this accompaniment that Cranston strode through the gate into Kelly's land.

"How's the boy?" came the cheery greeting from the unseen host.

"And how's Pat?" returned Cranston, endeavoring to locate the possessor of the voice.

A few steps forward, and the Irishman's lean but bent form was visible; he was standing, watering-pot in hand, irrigating some geraniums which grew on either side of the door of his shack.

Kelly brushed his fingers against his trousers leg, removed his corncob pipe from his expansive mouth, and extended his hand.

"Thought the crusher was shut down this morning," he said, inquiringly. "Sit down, me boy," and as Cranston took a place on the doorstep, Kelly seated himself at his side.

The visitor sat in torturing abstraction, his gaze fixed upon the plunging ridges, bull-pine-covered and purpling in the west, while he groped for an answer to Kelly's innocent remark.

"Oh, the crusher? Rountree shut her down. Some little difficulty in the mine, I believe," was Cranston's belated reply, fashioned to adhere as closely as possible to the truth.

"Been down to the bay lately?"

Kelly blew a lazy cloud of smoke through pursed lips. Cranston nodded.

Digitized by Google

"When did you get back?" pursued his host, eying him closely. "Something on your mind? What is it, my boy?" and Kelly's big paw gripped Cranston's knee.

"A pig!" was the explosive truth.

Patrick Kelly's gray head went back in surprise, and a hearty guffaw rang through the pines.

"What are ye giving us? A pig! Sure, that's a fine thing to have on your land, not on your mind, mind that. And whose pig is it, lad? And have ye gone into the pig business, and are ye going to leave the mining entirely?"

Cranston laughed in spite of his inward trepidation.

"Were ye thinking of buying me pigs, now?"

Kelly's head twisted in a queer bird-like attitude as he peered into his young friend's face.

"If ye are, I'll make ye the same answer I made that rascally Golden Bow crew when they came up here. Was it yesterday?"—Kelly scratched his head—"No matter, it was yesterday or the day before. They came up here trying to buy me land. Could ye be telling me the reason for that now, young feller? When the likes of them wants to buy, honest folks had best look sharp, I'm thinking. I never knew them to buy anything, and I'll tell ye me private opinion."

Kelly leaned forward to whisper:

"They're more like to steal what they want. Of course, that's confidential," he concluded with a nod.

Cranston's heart bounded. The Golden Bow wanted to buy! The news could only mean one thing; the channel had left the Golden Bow just as it had left the Big Dipper. A big bend running through Kelly's land would be immensely rich; channel mining was always best when the ancient river changed direction, for then the gold had had a chance to deposit along the bed-rock underlying the slackening current.

"So they wanted to buy, eh?" Cranston managed to drawl, cloaking his surprise.

"They did that. That chap Maxwell, the feller you fired, the one that had his hand in that gold-bar thieving business just before you became superintendent, was the talker. They palavered for an hour, and wound up by offering me twenty-thousand dollars for me three hundred and twenty acres. Twenty thousand dollars! There was me trip back to the old country, back to Ballyhaunis, County Mayo, and enough to live on all the days of me life!"

"What did you tell them?" Cranston asked feverishly.

"That I'd think it over; for them to come back today. They'll be here presently. Will ye sit inside and listen and advise me? I have a great regard for your wisdom, me boy."

"One kissing of the Blarney stone lasts forever, doesn't it?" Cranston laughed.

"But ye haven't answered me," insisted Kelly.

"I'm thinking," was Cranston's reply, and he concentrated his mind upon the problem Kelly's words had set before him.

Should he lay before the Irishman the entire truth; the exact status of the Big Dipper and the cause of his visit, or should he dissimulate, fall in with Kelly's suggestion, and leave the outcome to chance, relying upon the Golden Bow offer to form the foundation of negotiations which should put him in possession of the farm?

"Thinking, are ye?"

Kelly scrutinized the intentness of the young man's face.

"I should say that ye were playing at being Solomon and trying to decide the ownership of the child. Child, is it? Faith, it was a pig that bothered ye! Is the pig so valuable that ye must screw up your face like a judge? Answer me that now."

"Pat, if I tell you the truth, will you believe me?"

"I might try," said the Irishman dryly, "though the truth is rarely spoken in these parts. Still, if ye say it's the truth—" the small and faded blue eyes twinkled—"I'll do me best to listen."

Kelly's attitude was encouraging.

"What was that pig worth, Pat?"

"What pig?"

"The one the boys lifted last Christmas."

"And is it that that worries ye and has brought ye here at this late date, is it?" Kelly straightened and scowled. "Now, do ye take me for a ninny, young feller? Answer me that! Lallygagging about a pig, when a baby could tell that ye had more on your mind than your hair! Out with it! Ye didn't come up here to pay me for the shoat that red-headed rascal Rountree filched, and ye know it!"

"I did and I didn't," Cranston stammered.

"Come, come, put salt on the bird's tail

Digitized by Google

or it'll fly away!" said the old man testily.

Cranston drew a long breath.

"The channel's left the Big Dipper ground heading your way!" he blurted out.

Kelly received this startling intelligence with an amused, incredulous smile.

"Has it? So, that's the way the wind blows!" His gray head nodded thoughtfully. "And ye shut down the crusher for that? And ye started it again for fear I might tumble? Ye're a wise lad!" The smile broadened, but suddenly the face clouded. "That's the truth, Burr Cranston, the whole truth? And those Golden Bow fellers are troubled with the same sickness, eh?"

"I don't know, but why else should they offer you——"

"Twenty thousand dollars? By the saints, ye've struck it!" exclaimed Kelly excitedly.

"Come down to the mine and I'll show you everything," offered Cranston eagerly. "Then we can talk business. I'll better any proposition the Golden Bow crowd makes!"

Kelly wetted his lips and allowed his eyes to wander over the landscape before them.

"Ye said ye'd tell the truth, and ye have, or, by the saints, I don't know what the truth is!"

"Will you do business with me, Pat?"

"Faith, I'd rather—shuh! Into the cabin with ye! Here they come! I'll talk with ye after they're gone."

Kelly thrust his visitor through the door and shutting it, strode down the path to meet Maxwell and Dodge, one of the principal owners of the Golden Bow, whose heads, at that moment, appeared above the evergreen garden hedge.

Cranston stretched himself out beneath the open window and listened to the hour-long interview. Maxwell led the conversation, explaining that Dodge wished to bring his family to the mountains and that Kelly's farm just suited.

It was near the mine; had a beautiful outlook; could be made a pleasant home place; and that Dodge thought it had great possibilities, for the ditch carrying water to the Big Dipper mine passed through the highest portion of the land; which fact would make its irrigation a simple matter, and, as Kelly owned a water-right sufficient for all purposes, apples should do wonderfully well, etc., etc., but not a word was said, nor a hint given as to the Golden Bow's real anxiety to possess the land. Kelly heard the arguments with a knowing smile. Finally he asked—

"Were ye thinking of doing any underhand—I should say, underground work?"

"Underground work?" Maxwell echoed blankly.

"Yes, mining," was Kelly's curt explanation.

Dodge and Maxwell laughed nervously.

"What ever made you think of that, Kelly? Mining! Why, we've got at least two years of work left on the channel. Mining!" and Maxwell gave Dodge a relieved smile, glad that the question had been so easily evaded.

"Well, in that case we might talk business," suggested the wary landowner.

"Good! Twenty thousand dollars—" began Dodge, but Kelly cut him short.

"Wait, I'll tell ye what I'll do."

Again Kelly wetted his expressive lips.

"Yes?"

Both Golden Bow men leaned forward encouraged.

"I'll accept your offer of twenty thousand for the surface rights, that's all I'll sell—surface rights! I've been thinking of dealing with young Cranston for the mineral rights, and since all ye want is the farm——"

"But I want a good title," protested Dodge.

"Good title, is it? This is patented land; Section 16; a school section. The title's perfect, and I own from the surface down the center of the earth, and with taxes paid, mind ye that! There isn't a better title in the State of California!" and Kelly viewed the discomfiture of the would-be purchasers with twinkling eyes.

"And you won't sell the mineral rights?" asked Maxwell with assumed indifference.

"That I will not! Besides, ye won't need them, if all ye want is to farm."

Maxwell rose dejectedly, but Dodge leaned forward impressively and placed his lean hand upon the Irishman's knee.

"Think it over, Mr. Kelly, think it over. Twenty thousand dollars is a lot of money."

"For farming rights?" laughed Kelly. "Faith, ye never said a truer word! Sixty-two and a half dollars an acre for mountain land! Ye must have some scheme for taking the gold out of the grass roots! Think it over! That I will not! Take it or leave it!" Maxwell shook his head. "All

Digitized by Google

right, I'll bid ye a very good day then!"

The chagrined visitors departed, and Kelly turned to the door to find Cranston standing on the threshold.

"Did ye hear the spalpeens? And did I smoke them out? A fine lot, that Golden Bow lot! Come, we'll go down to the Big Dipper and see what ye've found out, and maybe that red-headed lad of yours, Rountree, will offer to pay me for me pig," laughed Kelly.

"If he won't, I will!" was Cranston's hearty proposal, and in single file, the old Irishman leading, they started down the trail to the Big Dipper mine.

LONG and earnest was the talk over the drafting table in the Big Dipper office. Cranston and Kelly argued and speculated upon the condition of the Golden Bow.

"I'm thinking that those fellers are in me ground now," concluded Kelly sagely.

"It wouldn't surprise me," agreed Cranston for want of a better rejoinder, for the settlement of the Big Dipper's difficulties was no nearer now than when its superintendent had toiled up the ridge. Kelly had studiously refrained from all mention of an arrangement, and Cranston's misgivings were becoming acute.

"And are ye still set on talking business, young man?"

The words had a magical effect.

"You bet I am!" Cranston cried, his enthusiasm now as great as his gloom had been.

"Have ye no suggestions to make?"

Kelly's ear came nearer as if inviting a whispered conference.

"I'll buy, or I'll lease!" was the instant response.

"Lease? There's a sound about that I like. Lease! And what sort of a lease would ye be offering to make?"

"I'll pay you a fifth!" Cranston kept his eyes on the older man's to read the effect of the proposal. "How would a fifth——"

"Are ye sure that's not too much?" interrupted Kelly. He spoke slowly and quite low. "Mind, ye have all the work to do. But how am I going to make me visit to the old country. I've no ready money."

"I'll give you a cash bonus."

The gray head wagged.

"And how much will that be?"

"Five thousand! That enough?"

"Five thousand and a fifth."

Kelly weighted the offer in silence. He was facing the door, and his arms rested heavily upon the drafting table. For several minutes he studied the map before him, his lips pursed. Now and again his lean forefinger tapped the paper.

Cranston knew better than to speak. He waited anxiously, though restraint was difficult. The lines of thought upon the Irishman's brow melted into placidness, and again the lips were wetted preparatory to speech.

"Who'll be after taking care of me pigs when I'm gone? Answer me that now, young feller!" This with a decided headshake.

But before Cranston could reply, the door opened and Rountree stood facing Kelly. The superintendent turned and scowled a warning.

"I—I beg your pardon," stammered the intruder.

Kelly tossed his head.

"That's the rascal!" he grumbled, raising an accusatory finger. "I'd know that red head if I saw it in the dark. That's the spalpeen that did it! He's the one!"

Rountree shifted uncomfortably from one foot to another, his cheeks reddening to match his hair. He looked from his accuser to Cranston and made as if to go.

"Ye'll stay right where ye are!" determined Kelly, and he turned to Cranston. "Ye haven't answered me question, young man," he reminded him.

"About who's to care for your pigs?"

"Exactly! Five thousand and a fifth is a bargain, if I can have me say about who——"

"Will look after the pigs?" broke in Cranston.

Kelly nodded solemnly, but there was the barest smile twitching on his lips.

"Who do you want to do it, Pat?"

"Brick Rountree, none other! Agree to that, and I'll sign a lease."

"What, me punch hawgs?" demanded Rountree with a grimace, and stabbing rapidly at his chest with his stubby forefinger.

"Sure, and better men than ye have done it," said Kelly pointedly, and Cranston burst into a hearty, boyish laugh.

When the papers were finally drawn a clause in the lease stated in due legal verbiage that one James, alias Brick, Rountree was under the obligation to herd such

Digitized by Google

swine and their increase as might be left upon the property of the party of the first part, meaning Patrick Kelly, during the said party's absence abroad.

"WELL, it's all fixed up; signed, sealed, delivered and recorded!" announced Cranston, drawing up a chair before the stove in the Big Dipper office, immediately upon his return from the county seat whither he had gone with Kelly.

"And you paid Pat his five thousand?" inquired Geiger with Teutonic exactness.

"Yes, and I saw him off on the Overland. He was all rigged out in blue broadcloth store clothes, and with his new suit-case was as happy as a boy leaving school at vacation time."

"Any message for me about his darlings?" grumbled Rountree.

"I should say yes!"

Cranston drew a copy of the lease from his pocket and, turning the pages, read the paragraph concerning swine.

Rountree listened petulantly. Geiger roared.

"How does that strike you, Brick?" teased Cranston.

"Why didn't he call me 'Hawg' Rountree and be done with it? Me punch hawgs! That's a fine business, punching hawgs!"

"Don't think that that's all you have to do, Brick. We've got a man-sized job on our hands."

"Meaning what?" grunted the official swineherd.

"Meaning that we've got to know if the Golden Bow is robbing our ground," Cranston stated positively.

"Maxwell will never let any of us inside the Golden Bow tunnel, and you'll have to survey his workings to make certain," was Geiger's terse summing up.

"Bet yer I find a way!" bragged Rountree.

"Fasten a string to a pig and drive him in?" chuckled Cranston.

"Aw, let up on this hawg business, will you? You can run a good thing into the ground, Burr," protested Rountree.

"Just what I suggested, Brick. Wasn't it, Dutchy?" This an appeal to Geiger.

"But your fool suggestion gives me an idea, and I'm going to try it tonight!"

Rountree rose excitedly, thrust back his chair, and made for the stairs leading to his room.

"Ever since last Christmas, Brick, you think only in terms of pig!" Cranston shouted after him.

Rountree swung round to shake his fist and, mumbling something to the effect that the last laugh was the best, disappeared, leaving Geiger and Cranston to their hilarity.

It was shortly before eight o'clock when Rountree emerged from the wooded crest of the ridge overlooking the Golden Bow mine buildings. Like the Big Dipper, the clustered structures of the plant sprawled over the hillside about the tunnel mouth. Electric lights dotted the stream-bed, for there the sluice-boxes spread in a fan, and illumination had been found to be the best watchman. Not even a looter of rifle-boxes likes to work where he can be seen.

The crusher roared. Machinery in the engine-house rumbled. The day shift was beginning to leave the mine, and groups of miners and muckers were waiting their turn to enter the workings. Loaded ore-cars rattled out of the hole in the hillside to dump their loads into the bunkers above the crusher, then, being switched, were formed into trains in which the relieving shift crowded to be taken to their posts.

Rountree crept nearer. Cautiously he moved from one hiding-place to another. At length he crouched behind a shed near the tunnel mouth. To accomplish his purpose it was necessary that the crowd disperse. A good half-hour slipped by, and then a rumble on the narrow tracks leading into the mine warned him that a train of ore-cars was about to exit; the first since the change of shifts.

With a rush it shot out over the trestle; a crash, and the cemented bed-rock tumbled into the hoppers. There followed a groan of unwilling metal as a switch was thrown, and the empties slid back along the inbound track. Opposite Rountree's hiding-place the cars came to a standstill. The man in charge swung to the ground and entered the tunnel boss's office for orders.

The door closed behind him in response to a gruff oath: October nights in the mountains are chilly—even Rountree felt inclined to shiver as he edged toward the empty cars. Before he could carry his plan into execution the door of the shack opened. Rountree, flat on the ground, listened. The motors of the electric locomotive hummed as the controller was advanced.

Digitized by Google

The train moved off. With a disgusted grunt he hunched back into his place of concealment, wondering if he would make good his brag.

Another ore train rumbled in the tunnel. The loads were dumped, the cars came back on the inbound track. Like his fellow the motorman entered the tunnel boss's shack. If Rountree would succeed he must act instantly, and with a spring he hurled himself into the last car of the empty train. All that the Golden Bow crowd could do, he thought, would be to throw him out if he were discovered. It was worth the trying, and he grinned as he fingered the revolver he had prudently brought with him.

Voices were audible as the door at the track-side closed. Footsteps crunched in the metal ballast between the tracks. Two men were talking; one with authority, the other answering respectfully.

"Could you make five more trips an hour by speeding up, Riddle?"

"We could do better than that if you double-tracked from the half-mile switch, sir," was the reply.

"I'll go in with you, and take a look," determined the first, and Rountree recognized the voice as Maxwell's.

The Golden Bow superintendent took his place beside the motorman. The train moved off. The echoing sides of the bore threw back a confused roaring. The rail-joints clicked. The head-light poured a stream of dancing beams ahead. Behind inky blackness took instant possession of the tunnel. Maxwell shouted in the motorman's ear. Rountree watched, kneeling. He peered ahead, endeavoring to estimate the rate of speed; counting the rail-clicks as they whizzed along beneath the regularly-set timbers sustaining the roof. Another light shone far beyond; faint at first, then it pounced upon them with the intensity of a suddenly-opened furnace door; a rattle, and the outbound ore-train had passed.

The end of the double tracks appeared in the distance. The cars eased in speed. Rountree made out the switch, for an electric light hung immediately above it. The train halted, and Maxwell swung to the ground, turning as he did so. Rountree dropped, but too late.

"Who's in that last car, Riddle?" snapped the superintendent.

Rountree did not wait for Riddle's answer. Revolver in hand he straightened and leaped from the car.

"Just do me the favor Maxwell, of standing perfectly still under that light! Yes, you might lift your hands a trifle. Good! Now order your man, Riddle, to set his brakes and join you!" Rountree swaggered forward. "Riddle, search your boss!" he commanded.

"You're wasting time," snarled Maxwell. "Does Cranston watch his rifle-boxes so close now that you have to turn 'stick-up-man,' Brick? All I've got on me is a gold watch and about three dollars in silver. You're welcome to that," slurred the speaker.

"I said, 'Search him!'" insisted Rountree, and while the reluctant Riddle obeyed, the man with the revolver saw for the first time the box against the wall containing the telephone. "No gun, eh?"

Riddle shook his head. Maxwell smiled sardonically.

The telephone bell jangled.

"Signal from the turn-out?" surmised Rountree.

"As good at guessing as usual, aren't you? If I don't answer, that ore-train will come along in about two minutes. Then it'll be three to one," purred Maxwell.

Rountree thought rapidly. There was danger in permitting conversation, there was also danger in silence.

"Take it off the hook!" he commanded. "Tell the outbound train to wait where it is for orders. Say a word more, and I'll have to use force."

Maxwell answered.

"Tell him to stay at that switch till I pass. I'm going to take a ride on your machine. Tell him that, Maxwell!"

Rountree heard the message given.

"Hang up!" he commanded. "Now, Riddle, uncouple those ore-cars from the motor, and be quick about it! While you're doing that I'll have friend Maxwell spoil this phone—Max, rip that wire from the insulator!"

The superintendent cast a surly glance over his shoulder, but obeyed.

"Good! Now, break off six or eight feet of it and give it to me. Get a move on you! I'm in a hurry," Rountree warned him.

The broken wire was handed over, and with the intruder at the controller the motor started through the switch and along the

Digitized by Google

single track toward the tunnel's inner end. Rountree smiled.

"Nothing to it, I'll get away with it dead easy!" he chuckled as he whirled on. "I'll get a look-see, turn round, and get out of here before they can walk to the tunnel-mouth."

THE switch where Maxwell stood was at the beginning of the bend in the channel from which the Golden Bow took its name. He saw Rountree's vehicle disappear, then reaching for the electric light cord, wrenched it loose. The tunnel was plunged in darkness.

"Take this flash-light and hold it for me, Riddle!" he ordered, and fell to repairing the damaged telephone line with the light wire.

His fingers worked rapidly. The task done, he grasped the receiver and rang. A voice came on the line.

"Who's that?" it asked.

"This is Maxwell. Uncouple your loaded cars! Put your motor behind them. Shove 'em out on the track! Quick! Then run back and get a crowd of men. Do what I tell you!" were the rasped commands. The superintendent hung up. "Push two of those empties on the outbound track, Riddle! We'll catch him coming and going!"

Maxwell sprang to the telephone again. This time it was Belcher, the tunnel boss, he called.

"Nosey, we've got Brick Rountree cornered. He's in here trying to find out if we're working in Kelly's ground. Gather up a gun or two and catch him if he tries to escape. We'll show him and Cranston that they can't monkey with us! Don't waste any time!"

The receiver was replaced and, laughing with contentment, Maxwell threw himself at the empty ore-cars to help Riddle execute the order he had given.

ROUNTREE drove the motor with great caution. The bend masked the track ahead, and he slackened his speed. There was no use risking an accident. Too fast on the curve might result in a derailment. His slow pace gave the man at the next turn-out time to complete Maxwell's order. Already two loaded ore-cars were on the line gathering momentum not only from the impetus given them by the powerful electric locomotive but by reason of the slight down-grade. They tore on, thundering through the roaring tunnel.

Rountree pricked up his ears, recognizing the sound. Instantly he shut off the current and set the brakes. The runaways boomed in the reverberating bore. Another minute and they would be upon him! He reversed and threw the controller wide open, thanking his lucky star that the Golden Bow trolleys were of the type that needed no shifting. The motor leaped under him, trailing its light like a ship's wake back along the track. The unguided ore-cars reached the arc of his vision; they were gaining on him each second.

Would there be a collision of sufficient force to hurl him from his seat? Would the impact derail the motor? he wondered. Clanking and thumping the runaways tore on. Twenty yards separated them from him. Then ten! Five! With a crash they struck. The headlight was smashed, exploding amid a shower of broken glass. Rountree, gripping the seat, found himself in darkness, and flying faster under the added weight.

He groped for the controller. The swaying motor slackened its frenzied speed He gripped the brake. Gently he applied it at first, then with full force. The wheels of the motor locked. With a hideous screech the uncoupled train was borne along the rails through a shower of sparks that flew upward from the chattering brake-shoes.

Then he remembered the switch. Had he left it open? If so, that meant another collision unless he could bring his runaways to a full stop.

In the distance he saw a spot of light. It was Maxwell's flash-torch, and it was leveled upon two empties. The spot moved. Again it disclosed two empties, this time upon the other track. No matter which way the switch was set there was danger! The skidding wheels slid on. Rountree released the brake, then set it. Now the wheels turned slightly, but the speed of the train grew less. The spot came nearer; like a shaft of sunbeams finding a way through a knot-hole into a darkened room it slanted across the tunnel.

The motor rocked into the switch. With a jerk it straightened, and bounded at the empties. The impact was slight; fortunately Riddle had neglected to set the brakes on the empty ore-cars, and Rountree's vehicle came to an abrupt stop.

Digitized by Google

Maxwell's laughter swelled to a grating guffaw as he illumined the set face of the man at the controller.

"Thought you'd get away, eh?" he sneered. "I've got a bunch, a regular reception committee, waiting for you outside. Next time you want to visit the Golden Bow you'd better come by invitation!"

Rountree slid from his seat.

"Hand over that torch, Max!"

"What good would it do you?"

"I said, 'Hand it over!'"

Rountree's voice dispelled all thought that the other might have had that he was vanquished. It cut like an icy wind.

The light changed hands, and Rountree swung it in a wide arc.

"Repaired the phone, did you?"

Without waiting for an answer he turned on Riddle.

"Couple those empties to the motor! Max, you get in the first one! Quick about it! I'm going to ride behind you and Riddle."

In order to carry out Rountree's order, Riddle suggested the use of the motor to pick up the two empties which the impact had driven a matter of fifty feet down the track.

"No sirree! You and Max can shove them back. I'll sit here and play lighthouse! Mind, no foolishness. I can use a gun just as handy now as when you were at the Big Dipper, Max!"

The two cars were pushed back and coupled. Maxwell started to take his place in the forward one.

"Hold on there! I forgot something. Come here, Max! You said you had a reception committee assembled, eh? Well, just you phone that the prominent citizen has missed the train and that there'll be no show. That's the easiest way!"

Maxwell strode sullenly to the telephone.

"What'll I tell 'em?" he asked.

"Anything, I don't care—so long as you don't use my name," chuckled Rountree.

The superintendent's voice quavered angrily as he spoke to Belcher.

"Never mind the guns, Nosey. I'm bringing some empties back with me."

"Tell him to disperse his gang," cautioned Rountree.

"Yes, and send the boys back to their jobs. You don't understand? I don't care if you don't! Do as I tell you!" snapped the speaker and hung up.

"Very nice, very," praised Rountree. "All aboard! We've got a clear track and I'm anxious to make time."

Maxwell climbed into the first car. Rountree, the light still in his hand, walked to the motor. "Get into the other car, Riddle. Here, you take this—" he gave him the torch—"it'll be safer if I continue to play engineer. All set?"

Both passengers replied in the affirmative and the motor started. Rountree ran slowly. Under orders Riddle held the light so that it fell on Maxwell's bent form and at the same time threw a beam ahead along the rails. A hundred yards from the tunnel's mouth the motor stopped.

"Listen, Max! I'm going to let Riddle run this shebang the rest of the way—climb over the back of the car, Riddle—and, Max, you keep your mouth shut and your eyes in front, and that goes double, Riddle! Savvy? All right, shoot her along and don't stop till you're well out on the trestle!"

Rountree made room for Riddle, and the train moved slowly forward. At the tunnel mouth, Rountree slipped quietly to the ground, and as he wormed his way through the scattered sheds about the mine entrance, the rattle of the empties running out over the trestle floated back to him.

"Maxwell will have to return to Belcher's shack before giving an alarm. There'll be plenty of time to gain the ridge, and then I'll take my ease about getting back to the Big Dipper," thought Rountree, smiling.

He had failed in his object, but one thing was certain; his conviction that the Golden Bow was looting Kelly's ground now had the force of a fact. There was some little satisfaction in that.

ROUNTREE found Cranston and Geiger leaning over the drafting-table and in earnest conversation as he threw back the door of the mine office upon his return.

Cranston looked up. There was a puzzling expression upon the newcomer's face, and the blue eyes had a green glint in them. Even the shock of red hair had a belligerent attitude; its tumbled disarray betokened fight.

"Well, are they in our ground?" was Cranston's greeting.

And for answer Rountree acknowledged his defeat. He passed swiftly over the details, bearing heavily upon his surmise.

Digitized by Google

"I'm as light-headed as Geiger—" Geiger was a small, blond South German from Bavaria, incidentally a hater of all things Prussian—"if they're not gutting our ground! Hello, what are you doing there?" he asked with sudden interest, pointing with his stubby finger to the map upon the table before Cranston.

"Trying to guess the location of the channel. I've extended the curve from where it leaves the Big Dipper, swinging it through Kelly's land and joining it with the bend of the Golden Bow."

"It makes a regular loop in Pat's ground," remarked Geiger; "but I was just telling the boss that the thing to do is to sue. Bring a suit for trespass and have the court order a survey—that's my advice."

"Brick, Geiger can't understand that the law's a snail. It would take six months to get action, and in that time our Golden Bow friends would get away with a hundred and more thousand dollars."

"And a swell chance you'd have to get it back from that bunch!" was Rountree's opinion.

"Then why not sink a shaft on Pat's land?" suggested Geiger.

"Too expensive; besides it would take too long," Cranston explained.

"Well, what are you going to do?"

"We can't sit here and twirl our thumbs," Rountree reminded him.

"N—o!"

Cranston rubbed his nose and a smile spread over his face. Geiger and Rountree regarded him with amazement for there was a tantalizing twinkle in his eyes that presaged mystery.

"Brick," he demanded suddenly, "could you run a level and get the elevation of Pat's shanty; the elevation above our tunnel, and do it without too much error?"

"Sure!"

"And, Geiger, if I sent you down to the county seat, do you think you could keep your mouth shut?"

"Keep my mouth shut?" echoed the bookkeeper bewilderedly.

"Exactly! Now listen!" and Cranston went into details, covering each point, mapping a sequence of events.

At the end of a half-hour he asked simply—

"What do you think of it?"

"Whooppee! Yip! Yip! Yippee!" yelled Rountree with delight.

Geiger's ebullition was more of a simmer. He contented himself with—

"By golly, that's some scheme!"

The next morning Cranston sat in the buckboard holding in two impatient horses.

"I'll be back in three or four days. Don't forget to leave Wednesday, Geiger. I'll meet you in Auburn, the county seat. So long, Brick! Get that elevation correctly," he called back, and the team sprang forward at a gallop.

THE result of Cranston's mysterious visit to Sacramento was shrouded in white canvas. Joe Holley's big lumber-wagon and trailer with their eight mules stood alongside a flat-car on a siding at Colfax, and a dozen men swore and grunted as they transferred the heavy and bulky burden from one vehicle to the others. Cranston had insisted that no covering should be removed; this added to the difficulty of the task.

It was late afternoon when the driver urged his animals into a walk. There were twenty-four long miles to be covered; by careful handling the caravan should be at the Big Dipper before daybreak. Cranston had planned the journey with one idea in view; the Junction and Arkansas Hill, the little mining supply center, must be passed through at night. The mystery must remain a mystery.

At seven the next morning eight tired mules lumbered into the Big Dipper corral. A feed and a few hours rest were necessary, for the wagon and trailer had not yet reached their destination. There remained the steep grade leading to Pat Kelly's farm. It was noon when the loads of both vehicles were safely deposited in the center of a clump of bull-pines.

A green-painted high board-fence completed the seclusion, and when Cranston made his final inspection a person moving through the more or less open woods on the crest of the ridge above the Big Dipper mine would have passed the hidden mystery without having his curiosity roused, so well had the work been done. But to make more certain that nothing should be discovered, two armed watchmen kept the fenced-in space continually guarded.

"Seven hundred and fifty-eight feet, Brick?" Cranston was checking Rountree's surveying.

"That's what I made it."

Digitized by Google

"Seven hundred and sixty-three, I make it. That's near enough."

"Pretty good for a hawg-puncher, eh?" laughed Rountree.

Cranston grinned.

"Those fellows who came out with Geiger last night—are they all comfortable?"

"Snug as a bug in a rug! Say, Pat Kelly wouldn't know his shanty. It's as fine a bunk and cook-house as any one would want. Sure, they'll be comfortable; and Geiger slipped away not five minutes after he got here."

"Good! Now, if you can keep the boys down at the mine from talking we'll be all right. Listen, they've got steam up! Come on," and the two entered the fenced enclosure.

The succeeding ten days were as full of suppressed excitement as a nut is of meat. Geiger came and went mysteriously, and always at night. Rountree spent most of his time upon the hill, coming down to the mine office only morning and evening, and then, having given Cranston a set of cryptic figures, would hurry back.

Cranston, following these short visits, busied himself with a peculiar sort of arithmetic. He kept his additions and subtractions in a pocket note-book. Each day some fifty odd units were taken from the elevation of Patrick Kelly's shanty, and the superintendent of the Big Dipper would smile knowingly to himself as he made the calculations.

On Wednesday morning, two weeks after work had been begun in the enclosure among the pines, Cranston called one of his men to him.

"Saddle a horse, and take this message in to the telegraph office," he said, giving him a blank upon which was written:

FRITZ GEIGER,
Echo Hotel, Auburn, Cal.
Apply mustard today. Slap plaster on tomorrow. (Signed)
BURR CRANSTON.

The man read the missive and grinned.

"Understand it?" laughed the superintendent. "No? Well, Geiger will! Now jump along, and get back as soon as possible."

Fifteen minutes later Cranston saw a cloud of dust rise from the road leading to Arkansas Hill and smiling, started up the trail to find Rountree.

The keeper of pigs was seated upon the doorstep of Kelly's shanty, whittling. Hearing footsteps he sprang to his feet.

"Tomorrow noon," announced Cranston.

"Tomorrow noon? Gee whiz!" and Rountree's astonishment expressed itself in a long whistle.

"Did you bring that powder up from below?"

"Yes, a hundred pounds."

"That's enough. Don't forget to have the detonator on hand. How's the work going?"

"All done, Burr. I've made a gate to slip in when we're ready."

"Good! Let me see your watch."

The two compared timepieces, adjusting them to an agreement.

"Keep 'em back, Brick. You're boss here now, and we don't want a slip. Mind nothing doing before twelve sharp! I won't see you again till afterward. I'll be on the ground to watch the effect. Remember, twelve sharp," Cranston cautioned, and stepping into the enclosure spoke earnestly to the men at work there.

A half-hour later he was back at the Big Dipper and occupied with the ordinary course of daily routine which now included Geiger's neglected tasks.

IT WAS raining in torrents; the first storm of the season, when Cranston rode away from the Big Dipper at half-past ten the next morning. Sheets of water rolled from the steep hillsides, filling the gutterways with reddish cascades that overbrimmed, and converted the deep dust into a quagmire.

His waterproof dripped, his horse's coat glistened as they splashed on toward the Junction. Beneath the friendly shelter of the outstretching porch of the road-house he waited, anxiously watching the road from Arkansas Hill for signs of a rig.

Joe, the loquacious bartender, appeared at the swinging doors and invited him to enter, but he refused. A long five minutes went by. Cranston nodded absently to the other's garrulousness, and then far in the distance appeared a shiny black object. Impatiently Cranston spurred after it. Fifteen minutes later Joe, still standing between the swinging doors, wondered at the tightly curtained buggy and marveled at the fact that Cranston led the way, not to his own mine, but up the South Fork.

Digitized by Google

The superintendent of the Big Dipper drew up before the Golden Bow office, and called—

"Is Maxwell there?"

The door opened and an arm pointed toward some buildings clustered about the tunnel mouth.

"He's up at the retort-house. Want me to call him?"

"No, I'll find him," returned Cranston and, as the man nodded and closed the door, he edged his mount to the side of the buggy. "We've caught 'em just right. They're about to make a shipment. You'll be guarding gold before a half-hour, Sheriff. That right, Geiger?"

The occupants of the buggy laughed heartily.

"We'll tie up ahead there and walk," said Cranston, riding on.

Up the slippery hillside path the three stumbled in the new-made mud and knocked at a small wooden building from the chimney of which rose a thin swirl of smoke that the wind drove up the cañon. In response to a gruff "Come in" Cranston entered, the others at his heels.

"Glad to find you at home, Maxwell."

The Big Dipper superintendent nodded pleasantly as he spoke, then glanced about the interior of the building. Two men were assisting Maxwell. Three bars of yellow metal lay upon a bench.

"Some clean-up, eh? What do you make it, twenty-odd thousand?"

Maxwell looked from Cranston to Geiger, then to the deputy sheriff with belligerent surprise.

"What do you want?" he demanded nervously.

"That!" laughed Cranston, pointing to the gold. "That, and a lot more!"

The two Golden Bow men ranged themselves beside their boss. One reached for a revolver lying upon the bench.

"What is this, a hold-up?" queried Maxwell sharply. "I've had enough of your nonsense, Cranston! Couple of weeks ago we kicked Rountree off the property. We'll do the same with you!"

He shook his fist menacingly.

"No, you won't; not by a jugful, Maxwell. And you'd better tell your version of that little run-in to Brick. He'll enjoy it."

Cranston turned to the law officer.

"Show him your visiting card, Needham! 'Tisn't fair to scare him out of a year's growth."

Needham drew some folded documents from his pocket, and, fumbling among them, selected the one he wanted. "A writ of attachment," he remarked dryly as he handed it to Maxwell.

The superintendent of the Golden Bow scanned the paper hastily. Cranston glanced at his watch. It wanted a few minutes of half-past eleven.

"Better send one of your men into the tunnel and get everybody out, Max," he warned.

"I'd like to know why?" snarled Maxwell.

"You'll see at noon. Take my advice, get 'em all out!"

"You think we're working in Kelly's ground, don't you? It's a —— lie!"

"We'll prove it to you shortly," remarked Cranston, grinning.

"Like blazes, you will!"

"Needham, take charge of those bars while I explain."

Cranston took a forward step.

"Prove it? You bet we will! For the last two weeks I've had a well-drilling outfit at work up on the ridge. On Kelly's ground, mind you. Last night we were down seven hundred and forty-six feet. The whole distance, allowing for the dip in the channel, is seven sixty-three. My orders were to stop at fifty-eight, just five feet from the roof of your tunnel.

"At noon Rountree will explode one hundred pounds of giant powder in the bottom of that hole and turn into it all the water from our ditch. You know it runs through Kelly's land. When that stream drops seven-hundred odd feet you'll hear from it. It'll flood your workings! Yes, and it'll prove what I say, that you're in Kelly's ground where you've been for over a month!"

Cranston held his watch in his hand.

"It's twenty-five minutes to twelve now. If any one's hurt——"

"A fine bluff!" sneered Maxwell.

His companions laughed insolently.

"Don't be a fool, Max! Cranston's telling you the straight truth," insisted Geiger.

The bravado faded suddenly from the faces of the Golden Bow men. Maxwell pointed tremblingly to the door. Tensely he ordered:

"Tell Nosey Belcher to clear 'em all

Digitized by Google

out! Tell him to clear the mine! Quick!"

The two assistants lurched into the open to race to the tunnel boss's shed.

"What did I tell you! There's proof positive," Cranston whispered to Needham, and started to leave. "You better come along too," he told Maxwell. "You can hurry things! Never mind the clean-up. That's in Needham's charge now. Come along! You stay, Geiger, if Needham wants you!"

Maxwell remained in bewildered inaction for a moment, then with an oath sprang after Cranston's retreating form.

ORE-CARS loaded with astonished men vomited from the tunnel mouth. They wondered at the reason for the order that brought them forth a good twenty minutes before the noon whistle. Belcher had not seen fit to explain when he growled the command over the telephone. What was more bewildering was the word passed along that they were to remain at the mine entrance until dismissed.

The shift boss worked through the groups, ticking off the names. The last car appeared. Its occupants responded to the roll-call.

"All accounted for?" Maxwell demanded tremulously.

Cranston was looking at his watch. The minute-hand was eleven short spaces from twelve.

"Hawkins here?" shouted the shift boss.

"Hey, Hawkins!"

The call ran from group to group. Each man peered into his neighbor's face inquiringly.

The boyish driver of the last train piped—

"He stayed to set——"

Cranston thrust him roughly from the seat of the electric locomotive.

"Uncouple those empties! Throw that switch!"

With expert hand he changed the headlight.

"I'll get him!" he cried, and the motors hummed as the controller was thrown open.

With a roar the low vehicle shot into the tunnel.

For a space an awed silence gripped the crowd. All eyes strained at the tunnel entrance. Then here and there came a mumble, increasing in magnitude like the thundering of an approaching train as the startled watchers realized what had happened. A confused babble of exclamations mingled with the scuffling of many feet. Maxwell stood alone, breathless, undecided. His workers pressed about him.

"What's all the row?" cried a miner in the rear.

Maxwell shuddered. He pictured the devastation that might result, the frightful wreckage a blast backed by water under terrific pressure could bring about. What if Cranston reached the working face and found his exit blocked? A cave-in was certain. He flinched before the eyes turned on him like so many accusing fingers as he haltingly explained the situation.

"We can't do anything but wait," he counselled feebly, and sought the shelter of Belcher's shed where the latter was frantically endeavoring to raise Hawkins over the mine telephone.

THE clicking of the rails, the screech of the trolley, the rumble from the echoing sides of the tunnel swirled about Cranston's ears unheard. His attention was centered upon the flickering light that reached out and out into the unknown beyond. The low car rocked. He gripped the seat with one hand, the other seized the controller lever.

With a complaining groan the motor lurched through the half-mile switch where Rountree had been discovered by Maxwell. The flanges of the wheels strove to ride the outer rail, so great was the momentum. Cranston felt the motor tremble. With a jar it settled back, and the tunnel bore bent in its great curve.

How much time had he? He drew his watch, peering vainly at the dial. In the hurrying darkness the hands and figures were invisible. Cautiously he edged forward. All would be plain if he could hold the timepiece before the headlight. The swaying car made the attempt perilous. With one hand he clung to the controller. He clamped his feet about a seat stanchion. He leaned forward, hand extended.

It was six minutes to twelve!

Not much time, but the tunnel must end soon. He wondered if he could stop his flying car, and then the thought came that he might have nothing to fear. Was it not possible that his secretly drilled well had missed the Golden Bow tunnel entirely?

The line swung into a reverse curve. A light was visible ahead. He could not see

Digitized by Google

the lamp, only the glare it cast. Drawing a deep breath, he shouted—

"Hawkins! Hawkins!"

He might as well have whispered. The lamp came to view. Just beyond the line ended in a fan of tracks and there before the working face stood Hawkins unconscious of his peril, setting the noon blasts.

Cranston jammed the brakes. The resulting shriek made the man turn. Cranston tugged wildly at the lever, shouting a warning. The momentum slackened. The car stopped beneath the electric lamp. Without knowing why, Cranston glanced at the roof. Drop after drop of water splashed down upon the tracks. Leakage from the newly drilled well, he thought, aghast. He looked at his watch. Two minutes, and it would be noon!

"Jump on! Jump on! Hurry! Hurry, man!" he shrilled.

The telephone bell jangled feebly and Hawkins laughed.

"That blamed fool's been ringing for ten minutes straight and there's nobody here to answer. He knows I'm busy."

"There'll be an explosion here before we can get out if you don't hustle!" warned Cranston springing to the ground and racing toward the man.

"Oh, no, there won't! Not till I'm ready."

"We're going to blow this mine up at noon!" panted Cranston.

He gripped Hawkins's arm and endeavored to drag him to the motor.

"Let go! I haven't finished my connections. What are you doing here, anyway?" he demanded belligerently and backing away. "Trying to find out what we're doing here? Brick Rountree——"

"In a minute we'll be blown to atoms! Run, man! Run for your life!"

"What are you giving us? I'll go when I darned please!" Hawkins shouted angrily.

"You won't come?"

Cranston clenched his fist.

"What's this bluff, anyway?"

Cranston sized up Hawkins's sturdy body in a twinkling. He was a smaller man than the Big Dipper superintendent but weighed as much. The motor's headlight threw its glare about them. Their voices echoed in the timber-propped cavern where they stood. A steady dripping of water reminded Cranston of the necessity for instant action.

"I'm sorry to do it, Hawkins, but here goes!" and the clenched fist shot out, backed by the weight of Cranston's body.

The blow missed, for Hawkins sprang nimbly aside.

"You dirty blackguard!" he snarled, lurching forward, arm back, ready to strike.

A heavy spanner, such as is used in bolting rails together, lay at Cranston's feet. The sight of it crystallized a plan. If he stooped to get it, Hawkins would be upon him. He made a blind rush at his opponent. The man backed; and turning, Cranston seized the weapon.

"I'll get you out if I have to knock you out!" he muttered, and, raising the tool, threw himself at Hawkins who received him with a volley of well-aimed blows.

Cranston staggered, but brought his flailing weapon crashing down upon the other's head. Hawkins dropped, senseless and bleeding.

Almost dazed from an impact with the powder man's iron fist and bleeding too, for his mouth was torn, Cranston gripped the inert body. A toss, and it was upon his back. He struggled with his limp burden to the motor, dropping Hawkins between the seat and the low dash. A trembling hand reversed, then threw open the controller. The motor moved. It gathered headway.

Hawkins moaned incoherently. Cranston thought it was something to do with the work, something about the noon blasts. He laughed bitterly,

"You'll never fin——"

And then a great wind seemed to concentrate its force upon them. The sides and floor of the tunnel quivered. A blinding light burst into being between them and the working head, and splinters of lagging and roof timbers, clouds of rocks and cemented boulders shot through the tunnel out which their low car raced. Cranston clutched at Hawkins, otherwise he would have fallen.

A cry of pain came from the crumpled man, and then for the first time Cranston heard the rush of the unleashed waters. With a crash the headlight had failed; a missile had shattered it in a thousand bits. In the smoky blackness behind them Cranston imagined a pursuing wave ready to engulf them.

"Hurt?" he shouted at his companion.

Digitized by Google

"My leg!" gasped Hawkins, and Cranston dragged the man to a safer position.

Emerald sparks from the trolley-wire again lighted the way with eery gleams. Intuitively Cranston realized what had happened; the initial momentum had carried them through the last block, now dead on account of the dangling wire, and into a line section which an undamaged feed-wire was supplying with juice. There was a light ahead. Cranston slackened speed. They passed through the switch. Now all was straight going, and with a sigh of relief he saw the blurred daylight marking the exit.

The motor slowed, and they ran out upon the level, into the rain, amid a surge of cheering, dripping men and stopped. Cranston slid from his seat and started to pick up the moaning Hawkins.

"We'll carry him! Here, three or four of you!" cried the shift boss, and with rough gentleness his comrades lifted the wounded man to bear him away.

Maxwell reappeared. Cranston looked into his gaunt face and gave him a gory smile.

"We proved it!" he commented, then glancing about, demanded, "Where's Geiger?"

"Here!"

There was a movement in the press and the Big Dipper's bookkeeper thrust his way through.

"Tell all these men that there'll be no more work on the Golden Bow for some time, not until this suit business is settled. Those that want jobs can come over to the Big Dipper. If they're clean, square fellows we'll take 'em on. Tell 'em the sheriff's in charge here and that the court'll see that they get their back pay."

A trickle of water had begun to flow from the mine between the tracks. Those standing about Cranston were too excited at first to notice it, but as it increased in volume some one shouted—

"Here she comes!"

The crowd swung about and listened to the thundering cataract pounding far within the hill.

"Whooppee! Yip! Yip! Yippee!" rang from the ridge above, and Rountree's red head dodged in and out among the brush as he ran down the slope, shouting and gesticulating.

Out of breath he halted before Cranston.

"She sucks it down like a—like a whale of a centrifugal pump!" he cried jubilantly.

Cranston pointed to the stream coming from the tunnel.

"They weren't in Kelly's ground at all! Oh, no! In a pig's eye, they weren't!" was Rountree's sarcastic comment, accompanied by a knowing wink.

"Still thinking of pigs!" laughed Cranston.

"Sure! I'm official hawg-puncher, ain't I? Ain't I, Geiger?"

"I've got an assistant for you, Brick. It's Hawkins. He's in Belcher's shed there. Go see him. Offer him the job. Your fireworks mangled him some, but he'll be able to do light work. His leg is crushed, and—but, he'll tell you all about it."

Cranston turned to Geiger.

"Fritz, I want to send Pat a cable. But let's get in out of the rain."

They sought the shelter of the retort-house where Needham still sat guarding the three gold bars.

Geiger produced a pencil and a piece of paper.

"What shall I say, Burr?"

"Let's see," mused Cranston. "I've got it! Put this down.

PATRICK KELLY, Ballyhaunis,
County Mayo, Ireland.
Have Golden Bow hog-tied. Sheriff sitting on lid. Pigs all well. (Signed)
BURR CRANSTON.

Digitized by Google

The One Alone Called Kiwasa

by Hugh Pendexter

Author of "Kinnikinnick," "A Bearer of Bells," etc.

IT WAS the Moon of Strawberries, come to make the colonists of James I. forget the hardships of the Virginia Winter. But Rick Bench, the young forest-runner, cared nothing for the fresh green of the endless woods as he followed the deep trail through the giant red cedars in quest of 'Lizbeth, the English girl.

Had fate delayed his destiny some three hundred years he might have learned at school how the English adventurers furnished the germ of development in this corner of the raw, new continent and dominated from the Capes to the Gulf and the Mississippi; just as New England was the hinge on which swung the control of the North from the ocean to the Great Lakes.

Human nature in its true essence is uninfluenced by epochs, and the masculine mind in the time of James kept to the groove it has ever occupied since men ceased beating women and began quarreling with sweethearts. Rick was not concerned about this new continent, soon to give birth to a mighty nation. He had thought only for 'Lizbeth, one of the handful of women hemmed in along the tidal waters by the forests and the hordes of savages.

The scarcity of her sex made her doubly dear to the young woodsman, only now his mind was streaked with irritation as he dwelt upon her perverseness and angrily demanded of the solitude why the devil she had behaved so. She had played a trick on him, a sly, cat-like trick that only a woman could be guilty of. Linked up with his resentment was a touch of fear for her safety. They had quarreled and she had told him to leave her and he had been mad enough to allow her to have her way and depart alone.

Of course he had supposed she would return to Dale's plantation to finish her fit of sulks. Yet that excused his negligence none; he should have taken nothing for granted where 'Lizbeth's whims were involved. He should have followed to see she did not fly off to become lost in the woods.

His fault was the more serious because he was the only white man along the York who had ominously warned that Opechancanough, successor of his brother, the mighty Powhatan, was planning some treachery. His quarrel with the girl sprang directly from this habit of preaching disaster from the Powhatan confederacy. That he should claim to be wiser than all the settlers along the York and James had irritated her.

For some weeks she had concealed her impatience as he mooned up and down the river, thrusting a tragic visage into every busy household and repeating his prophecy of danger hanging low over the fair land. It hurt her when some jeered at his prediction and demanded proofs. It had shamed her when he floundered helplessly and confessed it was largely a matter of "feeling." She had been humiliated when the kindly disposed took time to set him right and allay his apprehensions by reminding how the red people were a conquered race, that they were trusted and never betrayed the trust.

She, herself, had pointed out how Sir

Digitized by Google

George Yeardley had an Indian servant to shoot game for him. Would Sir George trust an Indian with firearms if there was any danger of an outbreak? He remembered her argument that white men freely visited the most distant villages and were guided home by the kind-hearted natives in event of their losing the way. As a climax she had cited the Indian college at Henricus.

He glumly reviewed all these snatches of recollection as he followed her trail. He knew all the logic was on her side. But what hurt was her saying she had humored his "absurd fears" because of love for him. She had flouted his intellect and hot words had followed. But he had been an idiot to "order" her to return to Dale's. Lord! how she had wheeled on him like a spitting tree-cat!

His dusky face burned as he recalled her tongue-lashing. She accused him of addressing her as though she were some wench sent over by the Government to be wived upon the payment of a certain amount of tobacco. And he had been fool enough to believe she would return to Dale's when she switched away down the trail.

The next phase of the situation was a sharp stab to his great love. Beneath her show of anger was the intention to deceive him, based on a ready reading of his simple mind. How clearly she had foreseen his blindness was proven by his passing the spot where she had stepped aside from the trail. Not till within a halloo of Dale's had he suspected the truth and turned back and found the place where she evaded him. He had passed within a few feet of her, and how she must have laughed at him and his woodcraft!

He quickened his pace, trusting to pick up her trail at intervals. He was now in a panic to overtake her before she reached the end of the cedars. Beyond these lay the ancient forest, the beginning of the Powhatan realm. Rick had dwelt too long in the Virginia country and had roamed too widely not to be influenced by the strange tales from the unknown back region.

Below Dale's was a land of wonderful richness already reflecting civilization's first efforts. Ahead was mystery, an unknown Something that inspired awe even in the border-bred. Rick always sensed a vague foreboding when entering the wilderness; therein lay its lure and fascination.

Here was where 'Lizbeth had halted, irresolute. Now she had hurried on. Another pause, and he noted the dry twigs she had broken and scattered before a further advance. The gloom ahead became shot with sunlight. He was at the end of the cedars and she must be very near.

A narrow opening ran like a lane between the evergreens and the wood beyond. He halted and lifted his voice in a clear, ululating call. Instead of her answer there came a low rumbling that seemed to shake the earth. It was so his expectancy that he jumped nervously.

Ominous thunder-clouds were crowding through a gap in the Blue Hills. The hoarse reverberation, the upward crawling of the dark mass, were symbolic of the beast which he believed still dwelt in the silent land ahead. The Powhatans had told him that the thunder was the voice of Okee, "The One Alone Called Kiwasa."

From the Indian women bringing corn to the settlements in the "starvation" days, long before he had won his honors as scout and hunter, he had learned of Kiwasa and his bestial sway. With all his forest daring and cunning he had never cared to venture near the temple of the evil one at Uttamussac. He had responded to the simple credulity of his time and environment.

Malign agencies, working through witches and devils, were firmly believed in by his intellectual superiors, and it was natural his intelligence should have absorbed the common poison. Who was he to deny that beyond the Blue Hills was Popogusso, the bottomless pit, where sank the daily sun to bathe in eternal fires?

Darkness was trailing after the approaching tempest like the black skirts of a world-high vampire; and Rick knew it was time he found his sweetheart. He turned to race along the hem of the cedars when a broken sumac bush in the opening caught his gaze and cemented fear into conviction.

Her hand had stripped that branch; she had crossed the ribbon of an opening. He started for the forest, and there came a searing stab of light, an ear-splitting shriek as a bolt shattered itself against a century-old monarch, the deluge of a cloud-burst. Half stunned by the shock he dragged himself to shelter on his hands and knees.

IF NOT for the accursed storm he would have found her before this. The rain and the mighty wind had cluttered the forest floor with débris, and any signs left by her light feet had been

Digitized by Google

blown or washed away. He prayed she had wandered north or west, anywhere except to the south and the Pamunkey. And he shivered as he thought of the three red sand-hills, where, it was said, stood the temple of The One Alone Called Kiwasa.

He knew the bravest of the Powhatans plied their paddles with hurried sweep when compelled to drive their log canoes by Uttamussac. Rick's courage always oozed whenever he contemplated the infamous precincts of Okee. He tried to convince himself that the baleful influence emanating from the region would turn 'Lizbeth back; that instinct would hold her clear of the Pamunkey. One so pure in heart must sense the evil before encountering it. But did he find her trail leading thither he would follow it though it took him to the heart of Popogusso's everlasting fires. There are some things a man must do sometimes.

The heavy musket slipped from his nerveless hand as he beheld a small coral bracelet. He had bought a pair for her from one of the corn women. Thrusting it into his deerskin shirt he scouted south, describing a half-circle. Twice he widened his investigation in this fashion and once more he was rewarded. This time it was the imprint of her moccasin in some forest ooze.

He never doubted she had left the trace; for he had made the moccasins, and, unwittingly, had copied the style of the plains tribes. They were fashioned from one piece of soft leather with the seam at the instep and heel. The Eastern and timber tribes used rawhide soles sewed to a leather upper. There was not another like it along the York. The impression showed she was traveling toward the river.

It was near sundown and the thunder-clouds were hastening out to sea when he came upon the second bracelet. This was conspicuously resting on a stone and evidenced that she had left it there in the hope that he might find it and follow her.

Despite his frantic fears for her safety his objective senses were keenly alert and he was impressed by the abundance of game, especially of deer. Had he not known his whereabouts this sinister omen would have warned him he was on forbidden ground. No warriors hunted here. The gathering dusk of the deep woods lessened as he drew near the river. Some snow-white cranes suggested ghosts of those who had intruded too near the temple.

Cautiously leaving cover Rick advanced to the stream but although parched with thirst could not drink of waters defiled by the rites of Uttamussac. As he took counsel with himself a thin, staccato note came down the breeze. Rick shuddered at discovering his proximity to the temple.

The One Alone Called Kiwasa sucked the blood of children and maidens. He was worshiped in every manifestation of destructive force, and the thunder was his voice. Powhatan men wasted no time in catering to weaker gods.

Rick shook off the benumbing spell. On a submerged flat rock he beheld some copper beads. Tangled in the reeds at his feet was puccoon, or bloodroot. Warriors had cast these into the stream to propitiate the malign spirit. For a moment the primitive in him suggested that he hurl the bracelets into the water as an offering. No sooner the thought than he snarled in defiance at the power of Okee and determined to die as he had always lived, an Englishman.

Drawing his tomahawk he followed the river toward the direful sounds. He had traversed but a short distance when he found himself at the edge of a clearing, while before him rose the three red hills which he knew was the site of Uttamussac. On each elevation stood a large house of bark and saplings, and it was from these that the strange sounds came, the *b-i-i-r-r* of a million rattlesnakes about to strike.

Dropping on his hands and knees, with his love for the girl prodding him forward, he commenced crawling toward the nearest house, or temple. Once he flattened out and held his breath as two ghostly figures ran by him. One tripped over a vine and Rick remembered old hunters' stories about the novitiates of Okee being painted *white*.

In keeping within the underbrush he was compelled to move half round the hill before he could begin the ascent. Only at the rear of the temple did the bushes grow almost up to the walls. With all his woodcraft he squirmed his way up the slope. Close ahead he heard a slight noise and stiffened. The slanting rays of the sun lay hot on his back but brought no warmth as he expected every second to be discovered.

The noise was not repeated. He penetrated a clump of sumac and found himself staring at the end of the temple. His heart gave a convulsive flop as a hideous figure emerged through the rear door and stood

Digitized by Google

within a rod of him. At first he believed it was the devil himself, crowned with serpents.

A SECOND glance told him it was one of the priests wearing headgear of dried snake-skins. The skins hung down to the shoulders and made a soft rasping note at every motion of the tall figure. The priest was gazing into the golden west. He commenced a low chant, accompanying his words with two rattles.

After a brief indulgence in this ceremony the priest retired into the temple, but left the door open so that the last rays of the sun might feed through and light the gloomy interior. Rick, now indifferent to everything except the fate of the girl, crawled forward and peered inside.

The dying sunlight allowed him to observe the arrangement of the long apartment. There were two doors but no other openings. Many repulsive images, which he believed to be likenesses of patron devils subordinate to Okee, decorated the walls of the room. Close to the door where he lurked was a skin-swathed form on a stand of willow-work which informed him the temple also was used for mortuary purposes. In a little cleared space in the middle of the room was a shrine, and as the sunlight vanished Rick expected to see the flicker of a fire upon it.

But the ashes were dead. His sharp wits began seeking an explanation for what, from a Powhatan viewpoint, was a sacrilegious negligence. A white figure glided forward from the front door and placed pieces of wood at the feet of the somber priest. The priest commenced manipulating them smartly and Rick thought he sniffed smoke.

Then a blob of fire gilded the top of the shrine. Something momentous was to happen. Rick long since had learned that the extinguishing of old fires and the kindling of new was a custom of great importance. When the ceremony was transferred to Uttamussac the reason was many times potential.

Rick was trying to connect up this renewal of ancient fires with his own recent premonitions of disaster when the priest lifted his long arms over the ruddy flames and called out sharply.

The painted attendants withdrew. Outside rose a deep chant, accentuated by the clamor of many rattles. Soon six priests entered, loathsome in their streaming snake skins. Obviously a ceremony of high importance was about to be performed and the guardians of the other two temples were present to assist. Behind the priests came six painted men. Forming a line along the wall they raised their arms and sounded a long roll with the rattles.

The rattles were stilled and in the lull the slim form of a woman glided through the door, pushed forward by one of the acolytes, and slowly advanced toward the shrine. At first Rick did not recognize her, even when the light of the new fire fell across her face, because of the puccoon-juice staining her face and neck. He had believed ever since finding the second bracelet that 'Lizbeth could not have escaped capture.

He had dared the temple to learn if his fears were true; and yet now that he beheld her he found her plight monstrously incredible, and his cry of dismay showed how entirely he had lost sight of caution. Only the chanting and roll of the rattles prevented his discovery. Without any plan except to die with her, to make sure she died first, he crawled through the door and behind the skin-wrapped mummy.

'Lizbeth halted before the shrine as one in a trance, her gaze directed at the priest, who stood a grim and gaunt executioner. For a moment the priest stared exultingly into her dazed eyes, then rested his left hand on her fair hair and caught up a knife with his right and pointed through the rear door to the ruddy glory flaming up behind the western hills. The sun was sliding down into Popogusso; and the priest chanted:

> The new day of your new power has come—
> O, Okee, The One Alone Called Kiwasa.
> We light it with new fires.
> We sprinkle it with new blood.
> We make you this new offering.

The hand holding the knife started to descend, and 'Lizbeth, the simple English maid, was done with wooing and lovers' quarrels had not Rick discharged the heavy musket point-blank at the tattooed breast of the priest, and rushed forward with the mummy held before him as a shield. As he charged he screamed like a madman.

The aboriginal mind believes what it sees without waiting for complex causes to be explained. The assembled priests saw the mummy of a dead ruler rise with terrific shouts and heard it speak in the voice of Okee. They beheld the priest fall across the new fire with his right side torn away.

Digitized by Google

Just why The One Alone Called Kiwasa should reward his faithful servant in such a sorry fashion was not a point to be deliberated. Such ingratitude was in keeping with the character of the god and presented another reason why he should be worshiped. The simplest among them comprehended Okee was displeased and, acting through the mummy, had slain the priest.

Without realizing the success of his coup and only knowing he had reached the limp form of the girl, now senseless or dead at the foot of the shrine, Rick held the mummy before him with his left hand and with his right reached out and delivered mighty blows with his ax. Over went the shrine; out of the temple rushed the terrified natives. Gathering 'Lizbeth in his arms Rick escaped through the rear exit just as the wood of the temple burst into flame.

SHE opened her eyes and in the light of the fire made out his grave countenance.

"You found me, dear lad!" she sobbed.

"Of course," he murmured.

Her gaze wandered in search of the forest roof and became puzzled by the dim outlines outside the fan of light. The black covering overhead was no lofty arch of the woods. The flames, too, were set on something high. She rose and was horrified to recognize an altar of Okee. With a little scream she clutched his arm and gasped:

"They caught you, Rick! Oh, anything but *that!*"

"Hush," he cautioned, and lifted his musket to show he was no prisoner. "Better here than in the forest."

She crept close to his side and whispered—"I was kept here—I remember that."

Her trembling finger pointed to a face leering at them from the wall of the temple."

"I'm burning his mate. They burn well," he replied.

"But I don't understand—if we're not prisoners—I can walk—let us go—anywhere but here!"

"Softly, sweetheart," he soothed, his gaze never leaving the front door of the temple. "No Powhatan warrior will come near Uttamussac. We have only the priests to fear—and I think they have a bellyful. One of the temples has burned flat—I waited with you in the bushes till I saw them paddling up-stream. Got in two shots before they won clear. They believe Kiwasa commands them to leave. But I won't take you back to the York till I know why they built new fires. Something bad's happening down there. Try to sleep—safer here."

All the next day she kept at his heels, pleading with him to take her home. Each time he shook his head, saying:

"We're safer here. Plenty of game and a garden—we must bide a bit."

On the second night he fell asleep through exhaustion and the girl aroused by some noise thus found him. She listened, her lips parted in terror, and heard voices chanting on the river. In a frenzy of fear she woke him and sought to drag him to the rear door. He went with her willingly enough, but not into the bush. He believed the place had become their sanctuary, and, once outside, compelled her to accompany him to the third temple where he lost no time in starting a blaze with flint and tinder.

As the dry structure burst into flames loud shouts of dismay and terror sounded from the river. The fire burned higher and revealed the black silhouettes of three canoes. Rick shrewdly guessed the priests had returned to learn the further will of Okee. The burning temple convinced them they were no longer of the elect. To accelerate their flight the hunter fired a mighty charge into the rearmost canoe.

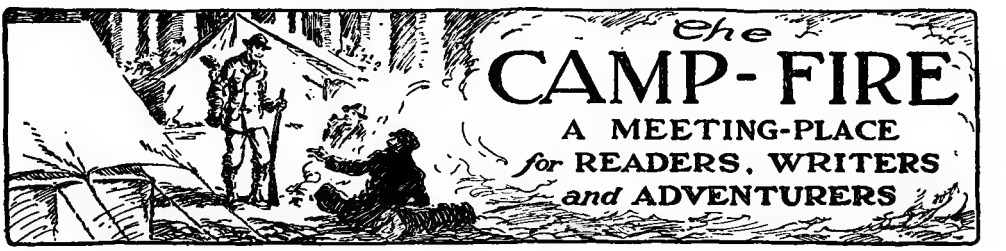
After that no Indian was sighted although the fugitives waited three more days before venturing down to the York.

Arrived at Dale's plantation they were met by barred doors and barricaded windows and learned the significance of the dead priest's chant. Okee's "new day of new power" had come, and from the falls on the James to the bay, Opechancanough had raided the unsuspecting settlements, slaying his hundreds.

But Okee proved himself a most short-sighted god, for he had turned a war of extermination against his devotees, and the Powhatan confederacy was crushed. Never again were the rites to be celebrated at Uttamussac.

And in after years Husbandman Bench often annoyed his wife by telling his children's children how the tantrum of a silly maid led two lovers to the knees of Death and thereby saved them from the last great revenge of the Powhatans. And the children always marveled at the story, because it was the savages who fled and not the fugitives. Which to the youthful mind sounded illogical.

Digitized by Google



SINCE the letter from W. Townend telling us of his transfer from the British hospital service to a commission in the line, comes this later word:

I have no news yet, but am expecting to go overseas again within a few weeks. France, I expect; maybe Macedonia, Egypt or India. I do not know, nor do I care. I had twenty months in France, but other fellows had such a much more terrible time than I had that I can not even grumble at having to go back.

By the way, it seems as though war were now the normal condition of existence. I personally can not write of anything but war. This makes ordinary story-writing rather an effort.—W. TOWNEND, 3d Reserve Garrison Battalion, Royal Welch Fusileers.

ANY one who knows the customs and history of our American Indians, particularly during the days when North America was still pretty well in their hands, will not make the mistake of thinking that Hugh Pendexter is making up the Indian "dope" in his stories as he goes along. The Indian of the past has been a hobby of his for years, and these present tales embody the information, color and Indian psychology gleaned from a deal of careful study and voluminous reading. Those old days, from the early white settlements in America down through Daniel Boone to '49, were good days and most of us like to go back to them in our reading. And when we do it's good to know that we are getting true pictures instead of imaginary ones.

Concerning his story in this issue Mr. Pendexter gives us some interesting bits of historical fact:

The Powhatan tribe gave the name to the Powhatan Confederacy—an alliance of the Virginian Algonkian tribes. The founder of the confederacy Wahunsonacock, is known to history as Powhatan, taking the name from that of his favorite residence on the James, where Richmond now stands. "Powhatan" is translated by Gerard, "falls in the current" (of water), referring to the falls of the James. The abduction of his daughter Pocahontas turned Powhatan's friendship for the English into hatred, but he was mollified by her marriage to Rolfe. Opechancanough, his youngest brother, succeeded to the rule of the confederacy and hated the English bitterly, although for four years he cunningly simulated a strong friendship.

The Powhatan religion differed radically from that of other Indian nations, in that there is nothing to show they had any conception of an amiable Great Spirit. They worshiped Okee, The One Alone Called Kiwasa, and a host of minor deities. All these were evil spirits, "dark forces," a more fitting background for German Kultur than for the faith of aboriginal people. They recognized their gods in everything that could harm or destroy, such as fire, lightning, flood and thunder, the last being the voice of Kiwasa when he addressed his slaves and victims. The great temple, erected to Kiwasa, was located at Uttamussac, placed by some authorities on the York, by others on the north bank of the Pamuneky, in King Williams county. Perhaps it is merely a question as to where the Pamunkey leaves off and the York begins.

According to the historian, "At Uttamussac, on certain red, sandy hills in the woods, were three great houses filled with images of their kings and devils, and tombs of their predecessors." There the royal corpses, "embalmed and wrapped in skins," were deposited. "At the shrines priests kept watch—hideous figures, with dried snakes' skins falling from their heads on their shoulders, as they shook rattles and chanted hoarsely the greatness of their deity." (Cooke's "Virginia: A History of the People.")

THE priesthood was recruited by the annual practise of selecting a score of male children, who were painted white. These were grouped about a tree and were surrounded by savages. An opening was left for five warriors to enter and rescue the children. The rescuers endeavored to shield their burdens with their arms and bodies while the savages sought to strike them with their clubs. It is written that "the women wept and cried very passionately." The boughs of the ceremonial tree were made into wreaths, "and the children were cast on a heap as dead." It was supposed that Kiwasa sucked the blood from the breasts of those victims who were his "by lot till they were dead." The survivors were kept in the wilderness by the five warriors for nine months, when they were deemed fit for entering the priesthood as novitiates. Cooke says Kiwasa "was never seen by mortal, it seems. . . . And yet it was known that he had come to earth once. On a rock below Richmond, about a mile from the James River, may still be seen gigantic footprints about five feet apart. These were the footprints of Kiwasa as he walked through

Digitized by Google

the land of Powhatan. . . . These singular impressions are on the present estate of 'Powhatan'—the site of the old imperial residence. Their origin is unknown."

ANOTHER peculiar characteristic of these people was their willingness to be ruled by women. Captain John Smith was captured and taken before the "Queen of Appomatock." There was a "Queen of the Paspaheghs." The old historian Beverley says Pungoteque, a village in Accomac County, near Metomkin inlet, was ruled by "a Queen;" and that Nanduye was the home of "the Empress," who exacted tribute from the shore tribes. Powhatan directed that his kingdom should descend to his brothers, then to his sisters, even though he was survived by sons.

The massacre executed by Opechancanough, younger brother of Powhatan, deceased, is a matter of history, of course. The kindling of new fires, when all crimes except murder were forgiven, was an important tribal ceremony.

A SUGGESTION to bearers of identification-cards from one of us who once carried one and now is carrying one again. Incidentally, no metal cards have yet been made. It's rather an expensive business and, unless they were made in large quantities, a metal tag, even at cost of manufacture, would cost you more than we want to charge you for them. On the other hand, it would be foolish for us to place a large order for them and have a large part of it left on our hands. As stated on the "Service Page" following "Camp-Fire," they'll be issued as soon as enough of you have registered your interest in them by sending us a post-card.

Some years ago I took advantage of *Adventure's* offer and secured an identification card. The serial number I do not remember.

Then I married, had children, settled down and sold my six-gun. At this time of my life so wild a thing as an identification card went the way of six-gun, money-belt, compass, etc., and was lost to me.

Now I am again single, have bought an automatic, money-belt, compass, etc., and greatly desire and need a card. Please.

I intend saying, on a post-card, how much in favor of a metal card I am. In the meanwhile I intend having my card welded between two thin sheets of celluloid. The card will then be secure against perspiration and salt water.

WHEN I'm feeling optimistic and a bit cocky I call myself "human," but when I'm feeling sort of down in the mouth I admit freely to myself that at least on occasion I'm a —— fool. I mention this because I'm now going to give you a letter written August 17, 1916, in connection with a story we published nearly a year ago. It's a bit overdue, but it's from Edwin C. Dickenson, introducing himself according to Camp-Fire custom, and he has a story in this issue, so here it is. It was written from the Mexican border at a time when we were considerably interested and excited over having our troops down there. After what has happened since then, it seems a long, long time ago, doesn't it?

Your letter was forwarded to me from Hartford, and same arrived today. Pleased, of course that you found "The Will to Die" acceptable. It was submitted by a friend of mine back home.

As to an autobiography—well, now I am sergeant of the guard in a troop stationed a dozen miles from the Mexican border, the moon is as bright as day, and nothing but the lowing of cows—but here! that isn't exciting enough.

However, I am a lawyer, but that is so far away that I have almost forgotten the fact. My present favorite diversions are grooming a horse, standing guard from 11 P.M. to 3 A.M., building latrines, incinerators, etc., etc.

But seriously, this is a great country and a great place for material, and one of these days you'll hear from me and it . . . I have lost sixteen pounds since I have been down here—and not missed them; am riding at one hundred and fifty, and none of my friends would recognize my picture, nor would it be a true likeness of me when I get back and off army fare.—EDWIN C. DICKENSON.

I'LL venture that all of you with Scotch blood in your veins will have noted the title of our new serial, "Claymore," with a very decided interest. Also that the tale itself will prove a joy to you. But the Scotch among you will be sure to note any variation from the strict facts of Scottish history. I think you will find the tale true to history in color and fact except where, for the making of a better story, the author has consciously made a few shifts and changes. The following statement to us from him specifies the minor points in question and, if any such assurance is necessary, will make it plain that Mr. Smith has shaped his tale with understanding as well as sympathetic hands.

In a story of this character it must be manifest that the fictional and the historic often overlap, but it has been the author's constant endeavor, wherever consistent with the exigencies of the plot, to follow the authentic records of tradition and in no case have liberties been taken with actual events or real personages.

IF ANY question the probability of a girl chieftain in the Jacobite army, they are referred to the instance of the celebrated heroine, Miss Jenny Cameron of Glendessery, who, finding her nephew, the laird, a youth of no capacity, led his two

Digitized by Google

hundred and fifty clansmen to Prince Charles's headquarters. She was present with the army throughout the campaign, save for the invasion of England, and was taken prisoner by the English at Falkirk. Other similar cases might be cited.

There were a few Rosses at Culloden, but the septs of the name mentioned in this story are purely imaginary. The Clan played a very small part in the uprising. It has been necessary to take some liberties with geography, in so far as apportionment of lands to different families is concerned. Any student of Scotch history will perceive that the character of the Gray Fox is drawn after the notorious Lord Simon Lovat.

Sheila's song, "Farewell to Glen Slioch," is a parody of an old Gaelic song, "Farewell to Glen Shalloch," which is in Fraser's "Collection" and practically every later collection of Highland music.—ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH.

AND here's another suggestion to bearers of our identification cards. Mr. Greene makes the suggestion from where there is plenty of water, but I hope the waterproofing of his card may never be needed because of the attentions of a U-boat. His former card was lost and he was writing for a new one. We're always glad to supply a new card in such cases, but, as the cards are numbered consecutively, the number of the old card can't be duplicated and the new one's number will be some thousands higher.

. . . So I am writing for another card. I am on one of the seized German ships as engineer and am crossing the Western ocean, so one might come in handy.

As a suggestion, would say that a coat of shellac will make these identification cards waterproof and will not injure the card.—F. V. GREENE.

CHARLES BROWN, JR., with a story in this issue, is in France with the American Hospital Corps. The list of our writers who are now serving our country is a long one, and there is another long list of those who have tried to serve and been prevented by matters out of their control. The Camp-Fire's good wishes are with all of them.

NATURALLY enough there is always a particular welcome for letters from *Adventure's* old-timers, those of you who have been with us from the day the first copy of our magazine was issued. That was the November number of 1910. I, too, am one of our old-timers, for I have been with *Adventure* since it started over seven years ago.

I remember how it was suddenly decided to start it a month earlier than had been intended and how, in order to get that first number shaped up in a month's less time than is normally needed, Trumbull White and I practically went to live at the printer's so as to save time in transmission. It was a case of nights, days and Sundays, and pretty much all of each. But we got away with it—by the skin of our teeth.

THAT was in the days before *Adventure* was printed here in the building, before we got our flexible, easy-to-read binding, before—oh, before so many things. Early the following Summer, 1911, all of Trumbull White's time was transferred to *Everybody's*, he taking full charge of that magazine and I of *Adventure*. Gradually it grew on me that here was something more than a fiction magazine—that it was, in a way, collecting a type of people that had never been collected before. I remember my growing surprise over the immense number of adventurers of one kind and another that there really are in the world. No one had ever before had any means of even making an estimate of their number, let alone of getting into touch with them. I had thought there were only a comparative few of them.

And, though the magazine was founded to meet the love of adventure that lives in all of us unless we are very dried up indeed, I had had no full conception of how widespread that spirit is.

Here, it became more and more plain, was a certain community of interest. Among people who hitherto had had no common meeting-place, no means of communication among themselves. Why not make the magazine that had collected them their meeting-place?

ALSO, in connection with some of our stories there chanced to come to light bits of extremely interesting fact, strange but actual realities that had gone into their making, and interesting things about the men who wrote them, men who often were themselves dyed-in-the-wool adventurers. (Old-timers, do you remember John A. Avirette, poor Harry Couzens, Captain Fritz Duquesne, Captain George B. Boynton, and the rest of them? Couzens and Boynton are dead; Avirette is likely enough in Mexico—dead or alive, I do not know; Duquesne—where? I do not know.) Some of these interesting things about our stories

Digitized by Google

or writers I began printing on the back of the contents page. You liked them even more than I had hoped.

Why not give more space to such things? There must be many other such items back of other stories, if only they were hunted out.

AND so, in our June, 1912, issue, when *Adventure* was only a year and a half old, the "Camp-Fire" was born. From time to time new features were added to it—"Lost Trails," "Wanted," "The Trail Ahead," "Letter Friends," "Back Issues," identification-cards, Service Page, "Ask Adventure." For five years and a half we have gathered around it; with the September issue of this year we began to gather twice a month instead of once. We are all, I think, glad of the opportunities it gives us. I know that most of us come to it eagerly, that probably a large majority of you turn to it first of all, before the stories. That is as it should be, for our "Camp-Fire" represents human companionship and fellowship, and fiction, too, must often be hard put to it to equal the strangeness and interest of facts and of human nature itself.

DO YOU remember, old-timers—but Lord, Lord, how I run on! And what did I start out to say anyhow? Oh, yes, that letters from our old-timers always get a special welcome. Why, of course, but why take so long to say it? And what started me? A letter from one of them, naturally. Generally, because I try not to boost the magazine at our Camp-Fire or to hand out words of praise about it, I cut out of letters such lines as "have never missed a copy since the first one with "Yellow Men and Gold." But I like that line, just the same, and this time she stays in. Also the line telling just how much trouble a copy of our magazine was worth to the writer. Two letters, in fact:

I am in port today and am going to write to *Adventure*, for I feel like I belong to the club around the old Camp-Fire. Not because of any merit or special deed, but because I have read *Adventure* in almost every port in the country and some of the ports of others. I have read the magazine since the first one came out and have never missed a copy. My copy for last March I rode a borrowed bicycle three miles against a northeast snow-storm to get, and then had to beg the dealer to let me have the copy he was saving for some one else. I am a marine engineer and served nine years in the U. S. Engr. Department. Am going to sea at 2 P.M. Monday, the 10th.—E. D. SPEARS.

At the time I started to read *Adventure* I was a "buck private" in Co. I, 3d Batt., Engrs., U. S. A., stationed at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. *Adventure* was my pastime aboard the transport *Thomas*, en route to Honolulu from San Francisco, March 5, 1912. After the fun of "feeding" the fish en route I spent the remaining two days with *Adventure* staring me in the face. Since that first copy I've never missed one.

While in Texas, January, 1916, I adopted a novel plan to save *Adventure*. Through lack of accommodations I could not save the full copy, so I tore the "Camp-Fire" from *Adventure* and kept it on file.

After seeing Hawaii for two years, a hitch in the Army, a bit of Mexico, range riding the cow country a little, with the U. S. troops in Mexico during the Villa campaign (motor-truck service), I've come back East and am "feeding a hog" (an iron one) on the Penn. Lines west of the Smoky City. By the way, speaking of smoke, burning coal without smoke, and keeping her hot, may strike some boomer smokes as interesting as it did me.—EDW. GUTTERIDGE.

FROM E. E. Harriman, in connection with his department in "Ask Adventure," comes the following letter:

Los Angeles, Cal.

In answer to several letters concerning minerals of Lower California I have informed the writers that neither coal nor oil had as yet been discovered in that territory. Will you kindly print in the next issue the information that oil has been discovered within this month upon one of the islands and gives promise of being in large quantities. The island, Angel de la Guarda, lies close to the peninsula, a bit north of Tiburon, which is on the opposite side of the gulf.

This discovery means an increase of revenue for Cantu, and in all probability, a clash between him and Carranza. Cantu is getting decidedly independent, and has his small army better trained and equipped than anything Carranza ever controlled. Also, as long as Cantu finds that the friendship of the United States means large sums of money in his own pocket, he will favor Americans. It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that he may achieve independence for his section and then—what?—E. E. HARRIMAN.

DON'T forget our readers' annual vote for the best ten stories in *Adventure* during the year. Any one eligible to vote if he's read at least seven of the issues between January, 1917, and Mid-December, 1917, inclusive. Serials, novels, novelettes, articles and short stories included; poems and "Camp-Fire" barred. Vote closes December 31, 1917, with allowance for those long distances away. Send in your vote

Digitized by Google

any time after the Mid-December issue appears, but, if not already doing so, begin now to note down your favorite stories. All you need do is write down your ten stories numbered in order of preference, and address and mail us the letter or post-card. If you like, add as many as ten more for complimentary mention. The same author may appear on the list as many times as you please.

The result of the vote will be published in a subsequent issue.

We want our readers to have all the say possible in making our magazine and this vote gives you one opportunity by guiding the editors in choosing the kinds of story the majority of you want. Most of you know that, in addition to the vote, suggestions and criticisms from *Adventure's* readers are always welcomed by *Adventure's* editors. Provided they are definite and specific enough for us to profit by them. We all gain by making the magazine better and better and it's not only more human and friendly but more sensible if we all work together as much as possible.

An appeal to the Camp-Fire for information, from one of us especially interested in the old pioneer days of the West:

August 7, 1917.

In the August Camp-Fire, in telling of the "Old-Timers," it mentions Capt. William F. Drannan. I had his book, "Twenty-one Years on the Plains and in the Mountains," which in some unaccountable way got lost, and I have never seen another copy. I would be pleased if you could give me information through the Camp-Fire, or otherwise, as to where I would be likely to get one.—ANDREW M. BUCK, Surf Inlet, British Columbia.

FROM Frank H. Huston, at one of his camps in the California mountains:

August 9th, 1917.

Am camped at old ford of Sweetwater, two miles south of Jamacha (Hammerchaw), where I had not been since '92 or so. What a change—a bridge, ranches, and wire fences! Makes me sick, and even "no hunting" signs to top off with.

"NEOW," Rattlers; for first time in my life saw *red* rattlers, one, about five feet, was alive and in the hands of a mestizo Mex, who held back of head and above tail with two loops about his (Mex's) neck to support body.

That was Sunday, in Moasa Cañon. On Monday, a mile or two above Monte, near stepped on a similar one in road and shot its head off and am sending you the rattles. Four feet eight inches without head and rattles, and coiling and striking without either. Only place they are to be found is the Escondido country. Brick-red, slimmer and more sluggish than black, or diamond-backs or yellows or grays, and hardly distinguishable on reddish soil thereabouts. Brick-red, rather faded or dull, with under sides of scales white, which extends beyond or at tip of scales, giving at a near view a wavy, silvery aspect along the lines of scales, rare and not often seen.

This chap sixteen or seventeen years old, first three years only a button. Could I bring myself to touch one would have skinned and sent you the same, but no gloves and can't touch anything that squirms. Congenital, I reckon; not even a caterpillar, enough—burrrr!—F. H. H.

THERE'S quite a lot to say about the American flag, and I'll not attempt to say it. Except to say that the man who sees in our flag only a piece of bunting is, if nothing worse, dull-witted. There are a few who see only ugly things in it, but that is not the flag's fault. Perhaps those ugly things are in the seers, not the flag. Perhaps, if there *are* any ugly things in the flag, it is we, the American people, who have put them there. But that is not the flag's fault.

I see so many things in it that sometimes I have to look away because they are so much bigger and better than I. I can not tell all the things I see, for I can not name them all even to myself. There are the things we call principles, which is a very dry name for such living, throbbing things as these can be. Strides forward in human freedom and justice, not for Americans alone, but for all the slow-moving world, these are in the flag. There are many more strides yet to take, but these, too, are in the flag. And we call them hope and purpose and desire.

I SEE a hundred million of living, breathing people in it. And the fate of that hundred million, and of the hundred millions that are to come after them, that, too, lies in the flag.

I see, generation by generation, the millions who have come across the seas to that flag, to find under it the things they could not find where they had been. And I see them find what they sought, though sometimes they do not know that they have found it. But that is not the flag's fault.

But I think most of all I see the blood of men who have died for it—their blood poured out on battle-fields or, invisibly, slowly through the years, on the less marked fields of peace. I see brave deeds, clean thought, uplifting purpose, sacrifice. I see

Digitized by Google

the loved things countless men and women have given up so that things still more dearly loved might endure for others. And I see the things that have endured. For nearly two and a half centuries men and women have been giving the things that make the flag the flag.

AND you, too, see these things, each after his own fashion, though somehow it is hard to talk about them. I know how hard it is, for my own few words came hard and with a foolish sense of shame. It would be better if we could talk about them a little more than we do, but, after all, seeing and feeling them is what counts the most. At least we can express those feelings, and acknowledge them proudly before the world by showing our respect for our flag through giving it always the outward tokens of respect that are its due.

But most of us don't even know how, don't know what those tokens are. The following tells us—a letter printed in the New York *Sun:*

THE FLAG

RULES FOR ITS USE, AS COMPILED BY A READER OF *The Sun.*

TO THE EDITOR OF *The Sun—Sir:* As a lifelong reader of *The Sun*, and being especially interested in every note you publish concerning the flag, I enclose for your use a compilation of facts and rules relating to the proper use of and respect for our flag gleaned from every authentic source, including *The Sun* and high Army officials. J. STEWART GIBSON.

Lake Titus, August 26, 1917.

Anniversaries on which the flag should be displayed at full staff:

January 3, Battle of Princeton; February 12, Lincoln's Birthday; February 22, Washington's Birthday; April 19, Battle of Lexington; May 30, Memorial Day; June 14, Flag Day; June 17, Battle of Bunker Hill; July 4, Independence Day; September 6, Lafayette's Birthday; October 12, Columbus Day; October 19, Surrender at Yorktown; November 25, Evacuation Day; December 26, Battle of Trenton; and other legal holidays or special occasions.

In placing the flag at half-staff it should first be hoisted to the top of the staff and then lowered to position, and preliminary to lowering from half-staff it should be raised again to the top. On Memorial Day the flag should fly at half-staff from sunrise to noon, and at full staff from noon to sunset.

During time of war it is proper to display the flag continuously; but it is conducive to the spirit of economy and to a greater respect for the flag to lower it at night and as far as possible protect it from inclement weather.

The flag should not be hoisted before sunrise nor allowed to remain up after sunset.

The flag should be displayed from a staff or pole whenever possible. When it is hung on a wall or fastened to the side of a building or platform, the union (the blue field of stars) should be at the upper left-hand corner when the stripes are horizontal, and at the upper right-hand corner when the stripes are vertical, as seen by the spectator.

The flag should never be allowed to touch the ground while being hoisted or lowered. Its folds should float freely and should be cleared at once whenever fouled.

The flag should be saluted by all present while being hoisted or lowered, and when it is passing on parade or in review. The spectator should rise if sitting; halt if walking; and standing at "attention," salute with the right hand in all cases, except that a man in civilian dress and covered should uncover and hold the head-dress opposite the left shoulder with the right hand.

When the flag is carried in parade with any other flag it should have the place of honor, at the right. If a number of flags are carried, the flag should either precede the others or be carried in the center above the others on a higher staff.

Nothing should ever be placed upon or against the flag.

Neither the flag nor a picture of it should be used for any advertising purposes whatsoever; nor as toys, fans, parasols, paper napkins, sofa cushions; nor as a cover for a table, desk or box; nor in any other debasing manner.

It is unlawful to trample upon, mutilate or otherwise treat the flag with insult or contempt; or to attach to it any inscription or object whatsoever.

To salute with the hand:

Raise the right hand smartly until the tip of the forefinger touches the lower part of the head-dress (or forehead if the

Digitized by Google

head is uncovered) above the right eye, thumb and fingers extended and joined, palm to the left, forearm inclined at about forty-five degrees, hand and wrist straight; at the same time look toward the flag or the person saluted. To complete the salute: Drop the arm smartly by the side.

I'M VERY glad to say that issuing *Adventure* twice a month instead of monthly has proved an entire success. The demand has shown that our readers want two *Adventures* a month instead of one; indeed, we felt fairly sure in advance, for so many of you had been writing in and asking for it. It has meant hard work here in the office to double the number of stories yet keep all of them up to the old standard. We believed we had done it; now we know we have and we are grateful for your endorsement.

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN.

ADVENTURE'S FREE SERVICES AND ADDRESSES

These services of *Adventure* are free to *any one*. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules*, thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one friend, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free, *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Later we may furnish a metal card or tag. If interested in metal cards, say so on a *post-card—not* in a letter. No obligation entailed. These post-cards, filed, will guide us as to demand and number needed.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

Back Issues of *Adventure*

Wanted: 1913—1914 complete. Will pay 10 cents per copy.—FRANK WALICKI, 179 Nineteenth Street, Brooklyn, New York.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located one out of about every five inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

Addresses

Adventurers' Club—No connection with this magazine, but data will be furnished by us. Can join only by attending a meeting of an existing chapter or starting a new chapter as provided in the Club's rules.

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. Entirely separate from Adventurers' Club, but, like it, first suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 731 Guardian Bldg., Cleveland, O., in charge of preliminary organizing.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

National School Camp Ass'n—Military and industrial training and camps for boys 12 or over. Address 1 Broadway, New York City.

High-School Volunteers of the U. S.—A similar organization cooperating with the N. S. C. A. (above). Address *Everybody's*, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Remember

Magazines are made up ahead of time. An item received today is too late for the current issue; allow for two or three months between sending and publication.

Digitized by Google

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for Adventure Magazine by our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each month in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable and standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested, inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

1. Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care Authors' League of America, Aeolian Hall, New York. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Also temporarily covering South American coast from Valparaiso south around the Cape and up to the River Plate. Ports, trade, peoples, travel.

2. The Sea Part 1
S. B. H. HURST, Box 892, Seattle, Wash. Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S. and British Empire; seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care Authors' League of America, Aeolian Hall, New York. Such questions as pertain to the sea, ships and men, local to the U. S. should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Hurst.

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; river, lake and road travel, game, fish and woodscraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs; and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2
HAPSBURG LIEBE, Johnson City, Tenn. Covering Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and N. and S. Carolina and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine. Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23d St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

8. Western U. S. Part 2
JOSEPH MILLS HANSON, Yankton, S. Dak. Covering North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri. Hunting, fishing, travel. *Especially*, early history of Missouri valley.

9. Western U. S. Part 3
Mexico Part 1
J. W. ROBERTSON, 912 W. Lynn Street, Austin, Texas. Covering Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and the border states of old Mexico: Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas.

10. North American Snow Countries Part 1
C. L. GILMAN having been made an officer in the U. S. Army, letters to this department should temporarily be directed to Harry E. Wade, Adventure Magazine, New York, N. Y.

11. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 2
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Covering Height of Land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y.); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

12. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 3
GEORGE L. CATTON, Gravenhurst, Muskoka, Ont., Canada. Covering southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

13. North American Snow Countries Part 4
ED. L. CARSON, Burlington, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

14. North American Snow Conntries Part 5
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipments, clothing, food, physics, hygiene; mountain work.

15. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 397 Monadnock Bldg., San Francisco, Calif. Covering customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

16. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, Sayville, N. Y. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

★*(Enclose addressed envelope with 3 cents in stamps, NOT attached)*

Digitized by Google

17. The Balkans
ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH, *Evening Post*, 20 Vesey St., New York City. Covering Rumania, Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Turkey (in Europe); travel, sport, customs, language, local conditions, markets, industries.

18. Asia, Southern
GORDON MCCREAGH, care R. J. Neuman, 160 Seaman Ave., Inwood, New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports; hunting, trading, traveling.

19. Japan and Korea
ROBERT WELLES RITCHIE, Mountain Lakes, N. J. Covering travel, hunting, customs of people, art and curios.

20. Russia and Eastern Siberia
A. M. LOCHWITZKY (Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Adventurers' Club, 26 N. Dearborn St., Chicago. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, Northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalin; travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

21. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, 1604 Chapin Ave., Burlingame, Calif. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

22. Africa Part 2
GEORGE E. HOLT, Castle View, Meriden, Conn. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, etc.

23. ★ The South Seas Part 1
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs; opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen.

24. Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, care of H. E. ROBERTS, 55 John Street, New York, N. Y. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, H. I. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal Northwest Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

★ (*Enclose addressed envelope with 3 cents in stamps NOT attached*)

Alaskan Opportunities

Question:—"I am seeking information on possibilities in Alaska. Could one, say with four or five thousand dollars, go there and operate to any advantage in the oil, or mineral fields? Would like to know what method one would pursue in getting into these fields. Do you know of any other line of business one could invest that much capital in with any assurance of gains? Can you tell me of some book published describing Alaska and its possibilities?"—J. D. WINGATE, Chanute, Kans.

Answer, by Mr. Solomons:—The oil-fields are not promising with small capital. One company—probably the only one of the slightest importance—failed recently, but was reorganized. It had a near-by market at Catalla. Few local markets exist near the oil-fields, and the export trade, in the face of plentiful Pacific Coast supplies, is a matter of the future. The "mineral fields" in general are, of course, the principal present opportunity for reasonably large and quick returns for investors in Alaska, though there are the usual other businesses and enterprises, though these are fewer and of less importance.

Your general question seems to be, "In what business could one invest four or five thousand dollars with assurance of gains?" And this is so general that very general counsel would seem to be called for.

Though I have had about a dozen years' personal experience in various businesses and enterprises in Alaska, I would myself, today, follow the advice I am going to give you, although I would probably not require all of a year or two in the investigation suggested.

If you really wish to settle in a promising field, go to Alaska with just enough money to live on economically, or, if you wish to turn your hand to odd jobs while searching, take even less. Having previously "wised yourself up" on the lay of the land from the Government reports and other literature, go to the field—southern, or interior, or northwestern—you choose to look into first, and be an interested observer and student. Take your time and learn the conditions. Most of the failures in Alaska followed precipitate investment. The country is big, the population small and often rapidly shifting, and all of these circumstances, besides numerous other special conditions, render it unsafe to decide quickly.

If you follow my suggestion for a year or two—though you might be able to hit upon something safe in a much briefer time—you will unquestionably be able to invest in mining or other enterprise with assurance of excellent gains and relatively small hazards. For profits are high in Alaska and opportunities many.

In common with frontier settlements largely of a mining character, however, Alaska is uncertain and perilous except to the careful and deliberate man of sound judgment. Take little or no outfit, except purely personal articles, and have your money where you can send for it and get it immediately when you want it, but let that be the very last thing you do—sending for it. Don't be content with superficial investigations. Be thorough and deliberate. J. J. Underwood's "Alaska, An Empire in the Making," T. A. Ricard's book and the publications of the U. S. Depts. of the Interior (Geol. Survey) and of Agriculture and the governor's report, all from Washington, D. C., free on application, will give you your preliminary information.

Third Mate's License

Question:—"What is the necessary routine in making application for taking examination for third mate's license for Steam? During last nine years I have been in the Merchant Service, the

Digitized by Google

Naval Auxiliary Service and the U. S. Navy. Does service in the U. S. Navy satisfy requirements for license? When and how is blank for application for examination secured? Will recommendations of naval officers satisfy requirements for signatures of three masters or owners required for application? When and where are examinations for license held? What subjects, aside from actual navigation are covered by third mate's license and to what extent?" —JOHN L. REYNOLDS, Norfolk, Va.

Answer, by Captain Dingle:—As I understand the extreme demand for officers will shortly force the authorities to lower some of the barriers, I hesitate to make a definite statement to you regarding your inquiry. There should be no reason why naval service will not qualify you, yet there seems no provision made to take care of Navy men. I think your best plan is to write to Mr. Robert E. Tapley, Local Inspector of Hulls, Custom House, Norfolk, Va., and ask him precisely how your experience tallies up. Meanwhile I will answer your separate queries to the best of my ability.

First (not stating whether or not Navy service counts) the laws say, "no license can be issued unless applicant has three years' experience on ocean or coastwise steamers of over 300 tons;" but since the alternative of two years in a school-ship such as the *Saint Mary's* is permitted to count, I don't see why your service shouldn't count still more favorably.

Get your blank by personal application at the Custom House, office of the Inspector of Hulls or his assistants.

If your naval service is available, it follows of course that naval officers' recommendation will serve for the three masters or owners.

Examinations are held at the inspector's office as a rule, and the examination is in writing; the time must by law be at the earliest moment possible after application has been made.

Subjects are usually: plain seamanship, rule of the road, lights and whistle-signals, fog signals, etc.; the general principles of loading a ship. Navigation includes for third mate of ocean steamers: latitude and longitude by dead reckoning (middle latitude and Mercator methods); course and distance by same methods; latitude and longitude by sun sights and chronometer, star sights; with the ex-meridian problem for latitude usually, but not invariably; amplitude by tables and calculation.

I don't think a third mate is expected to go further. I passed straight to second mate myself, twenty-four years ago, and besides the above subjects I had azimuths, double altitudes, and Sumner lines to the best of my recollection.

Anyway, none of it is hard; and you'll probably find it made easier for you now owing to the shortage of qualified officers existing. I advise you to get from a nautical book-seller near by a book called "Guide to Masters' and Mates' Examinations." It will help you a lot.

The "Forbidden Land"

Question:—"Can you settle a controversy I am having with a colleague? My friend asserts that the 'Forbidden Land' is now open to travelers since the British Expedition and that the Grand Lama has traveled out of this country into foreign soil. I have been of the opinion hitherto that Tibet was still closed to strangers and that the Grand Lama, according to some peculiar trust of their religion, so far from leaving the country, was never permitted to pass the bounds of his official residence."—REV. NEHEMIAH BOYNTON, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Answer, by Mr. McCreagh:—Your interesting discussion with your colleague turns out to be one of those in which you are both right—partly.

Your friend is probably referring to the Younghusband Expedition of 1904 under the impression that the "Forbidden Land," having once been violated, was now open to trade. This is not exactly so. The treaty at the conclusion of the operations guaranteed free and unrestricted trade between Tibet and British India; BUT, this trade was to be carried on by Tibetans. There arose so many international complications between England and Russia, each afraid of aggression on the part of the other, that those two powers concluded another treaty with China pledging themselves to prevent *absolutely* all violation of Tibetan soil each from her own side. The country is now closed to strangers, not so much by Tibetan aloofness, as by the British authorities on the Indian side and the Russians on their side.

As to the Grand Lama, or the Dalai, as he is properly called; your impression was correct, strictly so, until the year 1910—or 1911, I am not quite sure which. Before that the Dalai Lamas were virtually prisoners in the Grand Lamaserai, where they were held by the chief ministers as the nominal head of the Government. Affairs were managed by the Teshi Lama, who held the position, one might say, of regent.

In 1910, or whichever year it was, the then Dalai Lama was induced by his advisers to assert his authority against that of China in the matter of certain tribute. After much bickering the Chinese Government finally ordered the Governor of the Unnan State to march against Tibet. A weird and wonderful army dressed in ancient armor and equipped with a fantastic collection of weapons actually proceeded some way into Tibet; whereupon the Dalai concluded that discretion was the better part of valor and hurriedly crossed the border into Sikkhim, where he claimed the protection of the British Indian Government.

After a sojourn of about a month the difference was settled by the help of British representations at Pekin and the Dalai returned. This is the only known instance of a Dalai Lama leaving his residence in Lhassa—I should say, perhaps, the only authentic instance, as there are stories of a Dalai having left Lhassa before, but they are vague and legendary.

Goat-Raising in Texas

Question:—"Can you give me any data on the goat-raising industry in the West? Are goats a paying business? How much capital would be necessary to get a good start. I have several thousand dollars, and am not afraid of the hardest work."—HOWARD J. BLAND, Fort Wayne, Ind.

Answer, by Mr. Robertson:—In answer to your question as to the goat-raising industry in Texas; I think it a very profitable business, that is if one understands the business, which does not take one very long to pick up. A man can double his money every three years if he 'tends to business and has the ordinary run of luck. There is a lot of luck in stock-

Digitized by Google

raising. You may have a couple of bad years and go broke. One should have quite a pile of money laid by for hard times when he goes into the stock-raising industry.

You ask how much capital would be necessary to start. A great deal depends on whether you intend starting in on a large scale or not. You can take several thousand dollars and buy a good flock of goats, rent your pasturage, hire a couple of Mexicans to 'tend to them, you to supervise it. You should make good money if you 'tend to business.

There are a lot of goat ranches in western Texas. You will have no trouble in getting the land to graze on. About Marfa and Alpine there is plenty of land to rent; it will cost you about fifteen cents a year per acre. Your goats will cost you about four dollars a head if you buy them out West. You should make expenses from your shear, you shear your goats twice yearly. You see that does not count the increase, which is very large unless you strike a very bad Winter, then you may lose half your flock, so you see it is a gamble any way you take it.

I will be glad to give you any further information that you may desire at any time.

Read the five rules of "Ask Adventure" before asking a question.

No question is answered unless all rules are complied with.

Prospecting in Cariboo Country

Question:—"What part of the north country do you consider the best for a humble prospector? Also, how would one get there, and the cost of such a trip? We will consider that two men will make up the party, and that the trip is to last twelve months." —G. A. D., Port Townsend, Wash.

Answer, by Mr. Carson:—Five hundred dollars each should take you into the Cariboo country, and this is in my opinion as good a place as you could strike for. I would not hold out to you any possibilities of a second Klondike but in 1914 the placer miners brought out about half a million in gold from there.

To reach it from where you now are the most direct route is to take the boat to Prince Rupert and go to Hazelton by train. You can outfit here and the rest of the trip is an easy matter. I am sending you a map which will be of value in giving you an idea of the location of the country in question.

The hunting and fishing are both excellent in this section which has a most satisfactory influence on the grub-stake.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada.

ADVENTURE HAS FOUND ONE MAN IN FIVE ASKED FOR DURING THE PAST TWO YEARS

GREATHOUSE, JOHN T.; last heard of him North Dakota. Left his home in Mt. Vernon, Mo., in 1905; was then going to Minnesota. Now about 32 years, 5 ft. 10 in., light complexion and blue eyes. His sister and parents would like to hear from him.—Address MISS BITHA GREATHOUSE, Aurora, Mo., R No. 4.

H. W. H., my brother. Father died Aug. 8, 1917, in my care. I am drafted for National Army. Boys are in need. You can help me care for them.—Address LESLIE HUGHES, 2002 East Michigan Ave., Lansing, Mich.

SHEPHERD, "JACK" or N. G., now with Penna. troops, and Chief Wallace. Please write.—Address BATTALION SGT. MAJOR JACK SWEENEY, 57th Infantry, Camp Funston, Texas.

WILLIAMS, GEO. W., last heard from in Denver, Colo., 1885. Would like to hear from him.—Address JOHN SEASE, Box 225, Mecker, Colo.

ARMSTRONG, THOMAS, last heard of 19 years ago, McKeesport, Alleghany, Pa. Any information will be greatly appreciated by his sister.—Address MRS. A. O'NEILL, 34 4th Ave., Dominion Park, Lachin, P. Q., Can.

MCENANEY, PHILIP J., last heard from in 1900 while in Baltimore. Any information concerning him will be greatly appreciated by his brother.—Address THOS. MCENANEY, 3 Warren St., Charlestown, Mass.

GARDNER, HENRY, was in San Francisco in 1897. Volunteered with a Colorado regiment that went to the Philippines. Would like to hear from any one knowing his whereabouts.—Address JOE GARDNER, 329 7th St., Richmond, Calif.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the First February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

MORRISON, KARL C., Scout Master in 1911 of Troop in Norwich, Conn. Later architect in employ of State of N. Y. at Albany, N. Y. Home somewhere in Pa. Would like to hear from any one knowing his whereabouts.—Address NORMAN E. HINES, 17 Asylum St., Norwich, Conn.

WOULD like to hear from any former students of Chesterfield School, North Vancouver, British Columbia. H. Wynne Freemen and Hallett, also Mr. Bennett.—Address FREDERICO MONDRAGON (CUTHBERT), care Sud-Pacifico Railway, Casa Redonda, Mazatlan, Sinaloa, Mexico.

GRUMAN, HERSCHELL J., last heard of in a mining camp of Nevada in 1897. Might have gone to Alaska in the early rush. Mother over eighty and praying she may hear from her son before she dies. Medium brown hair, gray eyes, about five feet, ten inches. Any information concerning him will be appreciated.—Address M. L. HENRY, 809 North Seventh, Walla Walla, Wash.

KILDER, IRVIN, last seen in Yonkers, N. Y., March 23, 1914. He is 40 years old, about 5 ft. 8 in., light hair and blue eyes. Was always rather stout. Carpenter by trade. His daughter Hazel inquires.—Address MRS. HAZEL KILDER, 3 Hawthorne Ave., Yonkers, N. Y.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

Digitized by Google

WOOD, BASIL, with you on Key West *Journal* in 1903-1914. Please write.—Address TED DICKSON, JR., care *Adventure*.

TALBOT, ALLAN WHEELER, last heard from in Great Falls, Mont., in the fall of 1910. He's my brother and I would like to hear from him.—Address MRS. RUTH TALBOT DEMERS, Mont. Power Co., Lewistown, Mont.

MOORE, ROBERT H., last heard from at Muncie, Ind., in Spring of 1915. Was in Navy during 1912 and 1913 and later at Cavite, P. I., for a few months.—Address A. C. FRANCIS, Grand Canyon, Ariz.

GUTTERIDGE, "BO," ex-soldier Engrs. U. S. A. Wants to hear from the bunch. Mule skinner wolfram, windjammer, Layman, cook; Dennie Leary, "Pete"; "Batt" Strand and "Scratch." Also Howard Moody, former truck master Govt. Motor Truck Train No. 20. F. W. D. El Paso, Texas. Also Fred Johnson; Harpoole and Mechanic; Fred Yeager.—Address EDW. GUTTERIDGE, Box 161, Carnegie, Pa.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the First February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

THE following have been inquired for in full in either the Mid-November or First December issues of *Adventure*. You can get name of inquirer from this magazine:

BITTEL, GEORGE; Blakemore, C. Homer; Bliss, Archibald; Darlington, Chas. H.; Deveroy, Leslie; Garde, Corporal C. B.; Helmick, Roy J. and Carl H.; Martin, Charles A.; Poole, Arthur known as "Tinker"; Signal, Clarence J.; Stephenson, "B"; Stanley, Jack (Quills); Stoner, William H.; Sullivan, Eric; Tallman, Henry Merritt; Tannehill, Edward DeWitt; Teddy, (E. E. G.); Thorpe, Bal; Uptegrove, Elmer; Van der Horst, Fritz; Whitlatch, James Monroe; Williams, Covert P.

HASTLAR GAL BREATH, Bertha Wilkins Starkweather.

NUMBERS L. T., 284, C 293, W. 311, W. 312, L. T. 343. Please send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at addresses given us do not reach you.—Address HARRY ERWIN WADE, care *Adventure*.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

The First January number of *Adventure*, in your hands on December 3d, will bring you eleven more thrilling stories of the great out doors, nine besides those mentioned on page 2.

Wolf's War *By H. A. Lamb*

A powerful tale of the warlike Cossacks of the sixteenth century—and one of their warriors who single-handed is a match for a whole Tatar army.

The Little War *By W. A. MacDonald*

The *Frances* wanted privacy—and to insure it they undertook to drive out the construction company working into their mountains. That started the war.

The Yellow Streak *By J. Allan Dunn*

It takes red-blooded men to lay the foundations for lighthouses in the midst of the angry sea and on treacherous footing. Read of them and their hazardous occupation.

The Thoroughbred *By Buck Connor*

A story of horses—their feelings, their thoughts, their emotions—told by a man who has spent his life with them.

The Last Cup of Tea *By Stanley Hoffland*

It is the little things that count in the long run. A cup of tea is only a little thing—but it plays a big part in this story of the frozen North.

The Eye of the Hawk *By Hugh S. Miller*

Just how far do circumstances go to make the man? After you have read this story of a shanghaied sailor aboard a vessel in the war zone, you may change your mind.

Claymore *A Four-Part Story Part III*
By Arthur D. Howden Smith

In the third part of this stirring tale of the romantic days of Bonnie Prince Charlie, the fortunes of the Stuart cause go from bad to worse—and driven to their hills the character of the Scotch shines out more beautiful and courageous even than in victory.

The Fire-Bug *By Captain George B. Rodney*

A tale that is different—about a town in Ohio, where the fires were becoming as regular as clockwork.

Red Days in South Africa
By General B. J. Viljoen

All too little is known about the pioneers who made the first trails in the Black Continent. Here is an account, by one who grew up among them, that will give you an idea of the perils they had to meet.

FIRST JANUARY ISSUE

Digitized by Google

Grasp This Great Opportunity

To Establish a Permanent Profitable Business

—by monopolizing all the magazine-purchasing homes in your community. ¶ Establish a well-paying, independent business of your own. Enter a dignified profession, conferring as much prestige as Law, Medicine, or the Ministry. ¶ No capital is needed to enter this remunerative, unworked field. All necessary instructions, etc., are furnished by us—free. Read the remarkable offer below.

¶ You may have the chance to establish a permanent, profitable business of your own, in preparation for your advancing years.

¶ ADVENTURE now makes it possible for you to prepare adequately for your future, by monopolizing the great subscription purchases which are being made yearly in your territory.

¶ Among other things, our plan makes it possible for you, not only to monopolize almost the entire *subscription* business of each home, but it also enables you to monopolize almost all the *homes* in your community.

¶ Lack of space makes it impossible to say more here than barely to suggest the method we would like to explain to you in detail. Write today for full particulars of this remarkable plan for establishing either a profitable, dignified business, or a dependable "side-line."

Old age, statistics show, finds not one person in 1,000 worth $1,000 at the time of his death; not five persons in 5,000 worth $5,000 at death; not ten persons in 10,000 worth $10,000, etc. Statistics, furthermore, show that 70 per cent of all persons who live to the age of sixty have no tangible support of their own.

Employing the plan we propose, one of our representatives, Dr. Carl Scharf, Atlanta, Ga.—although blind—makes $10,000 a year; another of our agents, Alexander Heath, Malden, Mass., receives a yearly income of more than $5,000—and these are but a few examples from the hundreds now making an excellent livelihood by this special plan.

Write us today—now—before some one else secures your territory ahead of you.

Address—at once—Subscription Correspondents, Dept. 1 ADVENTURE Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y.

Digitized by Google

LIFE SAVERS
THE CANDY MINT WITH THE HOLE
Yo-ho-ho!
— and a box of Life Savers!
Your sailor boy will enjoy a box of Life Savers—
He knows how delightfully refreshing and enjoyable they are; how little room they take in his kit bag; how clean and crisp they keep; how pure and fine their flavor.
Send him a box today — don't wait for him to write and ask. And always pack a box in with the good things you send.
Four Flavors:
PEP-O-MINT WINT-O-GREEN
LIC-O-RICE CL-O-VE
MINT PRODUCTS COMPANY
New York
PEP-O-MINT
LIFE SAVERS

Digitized by Google